ON ROWING

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

rowperfect

With a new introduction and notes by
Peter Mallory

VOLUME IV

of Four

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THE LATER YEARS

In our fourth volume of the new eBook edition of the complete works of Steve Fairbairn we begin with “Chats on Rowing”, deservedly the most famous and beloved of all of Fairbairn’s works. It seems to capture best Steve’s informality and his tremendous affection for the subject and for his readers.

That almost none of Steve’s various books and pamphlets were conceived and written with a careful plan is clearly shown by the large amount of repetition of words, phrases, even paragraphs and whole sections. These all were the separate efforts of loving acolytes, men such as Arthur Eggar in 1926 for “Rowing Notes”, Freddy Brittain in 1929 for “Slowly Forward”, Buddy Gross in 1933 for “Chats on Rowing”, and T.B. Langton in 1936 for “Rowing in a Nutshell”. Only the last two pamphlets, “Don’t Exaggerate” in 1936 and “The Endless Chain Movement” in 1937, read like perhaps they were planned start to finish by Steve himself, and these were from his final years when his mobility but not his fertile mind had begun to wane.

I imagine all the repetition started out unintended by the various editors, but by “Don’t Exaggerate”, Steve was taking full advantage of it:

Fairbairn: “Read notes on rowing, and read them frequently, to get the constant repetition of principles which makes the book like a rowing coach.”

“I have repeated rowing with bent arms, and I have repeated many other points and, more than any other, this one I am going to state: it takes much repetition to make an oarsman, and reading rowing notes frequently is the best thing of all.”

Peter Mallory
Old Oar Cottage
2014

The editor of the 2013-14 eBook presentation of the complete works of Steve Fairbairn is **Peter Mallory**, author of ***The Sport of Rowing***, published in four volumes in 2011 by The River and Rowing Museum in Henley-on-Thames, England. More information on Mr. Mallory may be obtained at www.rowingevolution.com.

Stearn & Sons

George Drinkwater, the famous artist, sculptor and oarsman [Oxford Blue in 1902 and 1903. – P.M.], coach and rowing scribe, doing my bust which is the trophy for the Head of the River Race. When I began sitting for this I had no belief in the possible result, but one day I saw George had produced a real likeness of myself expressing the thought I always have on rowing: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.” Good luck, George.

CHATS ON ROWING

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

Organised and Edited by

BUDDY GROSS

of Jesus College

(1934)

eBook Edition 2014

www.rowperfect.co.uk

DEDICATED

TO

JOYCE

Joyce asked me could I give her some typing to do, so I started writing notes on rowing, and Joyce has had two years of strenuous typewriting. During those two years I have had a very great amount of correspondence from rowing clubs all over the world saying that they are rowing on my books on rowing, and that they are so much more successful, and adding that they are enjoying their rowing so much more. I would like to impress on rowing coaches the advisability of getting rowing men to read books on rowing. Rowing sinks into an oarsman mostly unconsciously, and reading “Rowing Notes” opens the channel for the flow of unconscious thought that governs rowing. Read frequently. I know men who have been successful from the frequent reading on rowing. These chats have been written to get oarsmen to teach themselves rowing. Athletics is just as much harmony of the limbs as singing is harmony of the voice.

If any oarsman reads these Chats and finds he gets more enjoyment from rowing let him unite with me and say Thank you Joyce.

I have to thank Buddy Gross for this book being published. Buddy coached the Jesus Lent Boat, 1934. We had a daily chat about the work of the crew. He produced a crew that had the best action for moving a boat I have ever seen. It was an exact imitation of the Heave Ho of eight sailors heaving at a rope, a perfect loose and easy elastic action as if they were heaving at an invisible rope. I have always thought that the quickest and best way to learn to row is to think your oar is an invisible rope and concentrate on that idea. I prophesy that Buddy will bring over a crew from his Fatherland, America, and win the Grand within a few years.

FOREWARD

ON THE CORRECT USE OF THESE CHATS

Several times during the course of the book, the author has explained the correct use of it, but it may be well to summarise his words here. The book is written in the form of chats such as Steve has, almost daily, with his more immediate pupils. Consequently there is much purposeful repetition, for the maxims of rowing are difficult to grasp thoroughly. The Chats can be read continuously or separately, but it must be thoroughly understood that abstract reading of them is worthless. They are written to stimulate the reader to thinking and thinking long and hard about his rowing, and to guide him in his practise in the tub. They are written in Steve's conversational style, with the result that the reader can sense that spirit of true rowing which has brought success to so many of his crews — the spirit of hard, true and honest rowing, coupled with intelligent concentration and rich enjoyment. The reader is exhorted not to read it once or perhaps twice but to keep it by him as a companion and mentor; not to consider it the views on style of a well-known oarsman, but the sincere endeavour of a wonderful teacher to bring enjoyment and success in rowing to the greatest possible number.

The author has chosen the photographs as illustrating the movements of two oarsmen who are very correct in their action. They show how bodies should move with ease and elasticity and with no stiff or showy movements.

B.G.

Chat I

The rhythm of rowing is only to be got by concentrating on working the oar and allowing the body to work unconsciously

Rowing, like everything else, is a religion, and I fancy oarsmen at times have been in the same frame of mind as the Scotch Meenister who, after playing a bad round of golf, said to his partner, “I must give it up.” “What! gi’e oop the gawf?” “Na, na, gi’e oop the meenistry.” Oarsmen and coaches are very apt to coach for too much length, for showy body-form, thereby breaking the rhythm, or worshipping the golden calf. The rhythmical movements of the good oarsman are not showy; they are all smooth and easy and machine-like. The better the oarsman the longer and harder he rows, but the less do his movements show. Trying to row too long breaks the rhythm and ruins the oarsman.

The oarsman must be perfectly honest and look the matter fair in the face, and realise that his job is to learn to work the oar to move the boat. That is the Spirit of true rowing. Similarly he must allow the Body to work unconsciously. Working the Spirit consciously, and the Body unconsciously is the religion of rowing. It is the only way to make the channels of the objective and subjective minds run in true harmony. When I returned to coach in 1904, I went to the Tutor of Jesus College and asked him, “Am I right in supposing that the position of the boat on the river is an index to the prosperity of the College?” He replied: “Precisely.”

The position of the boat on the river indicates the combined mentality of the Boat Club. The more honest and true that is, the higher will be the position of the boat. The Boat Club in a college is an important club, and its combined thought reacts and reflects very much throughout the college. The first precept of the Boat Club should be: See that the worst oar gets the best attention.

I finished that brief interview with the Jesus Tutor by saying: “The oarsman must look the matter fairly in the face.” He must go in for no showy movement. He must not try for any exaggerations. He must meet his stretcher fair and square. In fact, rowing is summed up in the saying: As you MEET YOUR STRETCHER so you MEET YOUR GOD. And this applies to every walk in life. If an oarsman sees that he does his best to propel the boat the next stroke, he will be doing his best to propel far more than the boat.

Stearn & Sons

Truth of action makes enjoyment of rowing.

The rhythm of rowing can only be got by truth of action, and to get this rhythm the oarsman must be sure he does not bite off more than he can chew. There must be sufficient momentum, generated by driving the oar into the water, to give the power, with a proper manipulation of the oar, to carry it through with a continuous endless chain action. There is always a tendency in coach and crew to get it longer. In other words to swing out further than the point from which they can row a true stroke, and to “drop the oar in” at the full reach instead of gathering taut and braced on the stretcher, and generating sufficient momentum by rowing the oar into the water. “Drop the oar in” is about the only old text-book instruction of the erroneous “orthodoxy” that is left. If one finds himself locked in a room and unable to get out the only thing to do is to break the door open. If one puts the shoulder against the door — “drop the oar in” — it probably will not break open. But if he draws the shoulders away and springs at the door and hits it with the shoulders — “row the oar in” — he will go flying through. A strong man with a clever control of his body need only draw the shoulder back a little way. A weaker and less clever man must draw the shoulder away further. So the young oarsman has to row the oar in a good way to generate enough momentum to be able to carry it through truly. As he goes on rowing, developing his muscles, getting more and more power, and developing his cleverness as an oarsman, so he will grip the water nearer and nearer the dead centre. If anyone, as an experiment, will row the blade in and drop the blade in, he will see how the rowed-in blade moves easily through the water, and carries very

much further aft than the dropped-in blade. Besides giving more power, and rowing further through the water, the action of the rowed-in blade feels much lighter work than that of the dropped-in blade. A very good illustration of the action that develops enough momentum is that of firing a candle out of a gun at a spade. The candle will go clean through the spade and not be in the least hurt; whereas, if the candle were pressed against the spade, it would crumple up, just as an oarsman would do if he really dropped the blade in and then pulled. To get the endless chain rhythm, one must keep the blade spinning and always have enough momentum so that the oar can always lead. Just as the blade is rowed in, so at the finish the "throw her away" and "strike the blade into the air" must give a momentum to the oar so that the blade is carried back with a swinging sweep, and rowed into the water with a sweeping swing. That is rowing the blade out and rowing the blade in. It should always be spinning ahead. On the forward swing it should feel to be pulling the oarsman forward, and he should feel himself leaning on the oar, holding an even weight on the sill all the way forward. That is the Rhythm of Rowing.

A few years ago I wrote "Rowing Notes". That had a strong effect on rowing, and I got very many letters from rowing clubs all over the world telling me they were rowing on that book and were very much more successful, and adding they were enjoying their rowing very much more. Then I wrote "Some Secrets of Successful Rowing", pointing out the errors of the body-form teaching. That practically did away with all the old body-form showy movements. Last year, 1933, a Pembroke four went to the Continent and won. The German paper, *Wassersport*, wrote an article strongly advocating the Fairbairn style as shown by the Pembroke four, and I got requests from Italy, France, Switzerland and Denmark to allow them to translate my books into those languages. Germany had already translated parts of these books. When I wrote "Some Secrets of Successful Rowing", I gave in it some letters from leading rowing clubs saying they were rowing on "Rowing Notes", and saying their success and enjoyment was much greater.

I have recently got many letters from the Continent telling me of the success and enjoyment they have got. Amongst the countries that have taken to my books are America, whence two leading coaches have written to me; Canada, by quite a lot of clubs; Australia, where many newspapers relate the success of the Fairbairn style there; Germany; Italy; France; Switzerland; Copenhagen, and several clubs in New Zealand and India have taken with success and enjoyment to rowing on my books. Also Japan has bought a good many copies of "Rowing Notes". The whole of the Cambridge colleges are rowing on my methods with noted success at Henley and in the 'Varsity Race. Girls' clubs have increased immensely in numbers, and are working on my books. Many Oxford colleges have taken to rowing on them also. Trinity College, Dublin, have done the same with remarkable success.

"Rowing Notes" is out of print; "Some Secrets of Successful Rowing" is nearly so. These books were written with the object of doing away with body-form teaching, and of killing the showy false movements like the "Lively Recovery" and the "Back Splash". They have attained their object. This book is to try and give the real Rhythm of Rowing which

comes in through the unconscious action of the subjective mind. A difficult subject. Just as Rowing has a continuous, endless spinning-wheel movement, so has the Universe. Like Rowing, the Universe is not biting off more than it can chew; it is spinning true, and as it goes on spinning, the length of the movement is increasing in size. So, in Rowing, don't bite off more than you can chew, and as you row a short true stroke, so in time the length of your endless chain movement will be doubled, just as the Universe is going to double its size in some millions of years. So there is no hurry; DON'T RUSH.

Here is a letter from Mr. Arthur Dreyfus [coach of Fußballclub Zürich. – P.M.], Zollikon, Switzerland:

" . . . I have read your book, 'Some Secrets of Successful Rowing' and have lectured upon it to my boys. We have started immediately to put your methods into practise, and are endeavouring when rowing to row only with the oar, eliminating the body-work entirely. We immediately ascertained that the boat ran much easier and steadier through the water and we want to get this kind of rowing adopted by our club.

" . . . The Regatta in Zürich was held on July 7-8th, and my crews were quite successful *owing to the Fairbairn methods and system*. On July 21st my senior crew and my sculler went out to Mainz in Germany to meet the best crews there. My boys won the four without cox against Ruderriege des Essener Turn- and Fechtclub and the Berliner Ruder-Club Sport-Borussia. The four with cox they won against Spandauer Ruder-Club Friesen-Berlin, the Hungarian Champion Pannonia Evezős Egyletben-Budapest and the Rowing Club Victoria Danzig. But the greatest surprise of this regatta was the victory of my boy who, for the first year, was rowing in a sculling boat, over Dr. Buhtz, the winner of the Diamond Sculls at Henley [Herbert Buhtz, 1911-2006, a dentist, represented Berliner Ruder-Club, 1932 and 1934 Diamond Sculls winner, 1932 Olympic Double Sculls Silver Medallist. – P.M.]. I need not tell you how glad I am that it was my boy, who is rowing exactly the Fairbairn style, who got first.

" . . . After Mannheim came the International Regatta, Zürich; my crews had a big success there and everybody was anxious to see the 'Fairbairn-style'. My boys won very easily their races. . . . it may interest you to hear what the leading journal says. 'Four without cox: A wonderful race took place . . . the Football Club came right off their opponents and in a wonderful easy appearing style, they put as much distance between them as they wished to . . . owing to their wonderful way of rowing they were applauded even during their race by the spectators on the steamer. Senior Eight: This race was a big surprise. The crew of the Fußballclub Zürich, of which one had not heard much till now as being a great Eight, gets right ahead from the start. They finish the race a good length on the German League Eight, the Mainzer Ruder-Verein, Ruderclub Schaffhausen, Seeclub Luzern, Étoile Sportive Bierné and the Société Nautique Geneva. Their wonderful and workmanlike style was the reason of their victory. . . .' The name Fairbairn is now known in this country amongst oarsmen as well as William Tell.

" . . . Sunday last we had the Swiss Championship on the Rotsee, near Lucerne, my clubs won five championships out of eight. This is quite a record . . . everybody was

admiring the style, even the loud speaker said, whenever my crew was in a race: ‘Watch the wonderful work done by the Fußballclub Zürich. Look at the Fairbairn-boat.’ More than once the name Fairbairn was going round that day.”

As I write I have just got a letter from Portuguese East Africa, asking for my book on rowing. So that makes the whole five Continents.

I have also got a letter recently from France from an oarsman, saying he is rowing on my books, and adding that he won the 80 kilometre race (about 50 miles) in 7 hours and some minutes. So he goes in for my main maxim, Mileage Makes Champions.

As I have said, my books are being worked on very much on the Continent, and we read that by working on them a sculler beat Dr. Buhtz, a very fine sculler. Also the Berlin crew that has been victorious had to take third place this year. Also Copenhagen beat the London Rowing Club, which was a very fine crew. So oarsmen will be well advised to read this book. Oarsmen do not realise how much they can improve by reading rowing books.

Chat II

Introductory

Oarsmen are not drawn from the highest class of athletes; cricket, football, etc., take the best athletes, and so we get many men in the rowing world whose athletic sense is dormant. I will give a few examples which tend to show how one must repeat rowing maxims to drive them home. The first was a man I was tubbing; he rowed three years at college. I changed places with him in the tub pair. He varied from the balance so much that he brought the water in over the side of the boat. I told him he must be more careful about his balance, and he said, “Did I do that? I thought it was you.” There was an instance of an oarsman with no sense of Balance.

From long experience I know that many oarsmen lack the sense of Balance; it wants driving home. Again, many oarsmen have little or no sense of concentration. They go down to row and never concentrate on trying to improve. My classic example of this was a Jesus man who was a Freshman with me. He was turned out of the Crock Eights his first term. Being an exceptionally well-built man I tubbed him next term. He began to talk of other things, showing an utter lack of concentration. I told him that that was why he was turned out of the Crock Eights and added that he must concentrate on his rowing if he wanted to learn to row. He concentrated and got into the Jesus 1st Lent Boat, next term into the Jesus May Boat, and next term into the ’Varsity Trial Eights, the next term he won the ’Varsity Boat Race.

Very many oarsmen go down to row with the same lack of concentration and just take a daily gentleman’s outing in the boat; they slop along anyhow making innumerable mistakes, and so begin doing harm to the crew, the club or college, and to themselves. They think their rowing capacity is a fixed quantity, not realising that they can improve by concentration from their present capacity — frequently nil — to perfection, according to the amount of concentration on trying to improve that they give. Of course, they will never arrive at perfection because the best built human being is not a perfect rowing machine. It is sad to see very many oarsmen rowing day after day, year after year with no improvement, or the minimum, because they do not try to improve. They think the coach will do all the improvement, and their brains lie dormant. So, would-be oarsmen, your improvement in rowing depends on concentration and on doing your best to improve. This common dormant mentality does harm to the crew, the club, and the individual.

The next case was the one that convinced me more than anything else of the necessity for repetition. I was coaching the Queensland eight for the Inter-State Race, and got out a crew of older oarsmen which raced and beat the State crew three successive nights over three miles. I was rowing in the older crew. On returning to coach the younger crew, I gave the stroke some instruction, and he said, “That was what you told the other crew, and what made them beat us.” I said, “If I have told you that once before, I have told you twenty times, but you took no notice till the other crew beat you.”

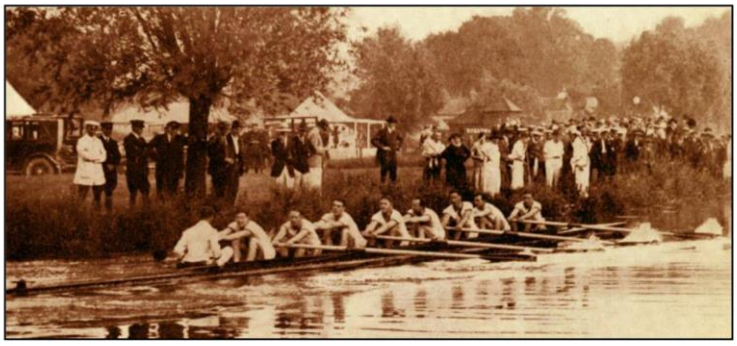
The next case was an Eton boy I was coaching. He fairly dragged his oar very heavily on the top of the water. It soon dawned on me that he was lifting the handle of the oar to try and lift the blade off the water. I gave the crew the “Strike! Lower!” exercise, and he learnt to raise the blade up by striking the sill of the rowlock. Many oarsmen are nearer the frame of mind of these examples than one could credit possible. Their minds are in a whirl and a tangle respecting the many intricate movements of the oar. There is a tendency to rush, hurry, and scramble in rowing just as there is a tendency to press at golf. This shows a wrong attitude of mind. My classic example of this was a Jesus man in a junior crew who got into the boat at the start of the Lent races. He got in the wrong way round, facing the bows, and I had to readjust him. That night his temperature was 102°.

Reading and understanding the movements as they are given in this book, and concentrating on working the oar will turn rowing into a wonderful joy. Frequent reading is necessary. To have read this book through and think you know all about it, is no use. I recommend reading a chapter every night when going to bed. When reading, read concretely. That is to say, see yourself in a boat executing all the movements. The best example of this was a Jesus man who read some notes on rowing every night as he went to bed. He was not a good athlete, but through reading and concentrating he got his Blue, and became President of the Cambridge Boat Club.

Rowing is a natural action with no false show, but there has been a strong tendency in the rowing world to go for exaggerations, and especially showy ones. The worst one was the “Lively Recovery”, and possibly the next worst one was the “Back Splash”. Lively Recovery was — “hold the knees flat till the body is swung right down, and then slide up.” This meant a fast jerky movement of the body. It threw a strain on the stomach muscles, and strained them badly. It was a straining, tiring action, and had a bad effect on people’s hearts. Doctors told me when I returned to England at the beginning of this century, that rowing was bad for the heart. I knew this was wrong, but when I saw the rowing, I saw that the Doctors were right if they meant: “rowing as now taught.” I also understood why an Australian Cambridge Blue said to me after a trip to England: “I saw the rowing at Cambridge, and I cried; then I saw the rowing at Oxford, and I laughed.” So I returned to coach, and Jesus crews were so successful that twelve other colleges had Jesus coaches, and the “Lively Recovery” was killed. A masseur said to me: “I used to have sixty men every term whose abdominal muscles I had to massage and strap up, but since Jesus men have taken to coaching, I have not one.” So I have saved many constitutions from being ruined by strained hearts and abdominal muscles.

It seemed extraordinary to me that every coach went bald-headed for this showy Lively Recovery; surely some of them must have felt how wrong it was. No doubt it was a case of follow the leader, with the consequent surrendering of initiative. There is the first lesson to oarsmen: “Never surrender your initiative.” In fact, try the Lively Recovery and the Back Splash if you like. The Back Splash meant splashing water into the boat with the back of the oar blade. I suppose the idea was to get the blade into the water without missing any of the reach, in fact, exaggerating the old teaching of “Drop the blade in at

the full reach." That meant backwatering, and Back Splash meant backwatering hard. As I have said, these lively-looking exaggerations are very apt to creep in. So, coach and oarsman, no rowing for show; stick to natural action to move the boat.



1925 Jesus College May Boat, Head of the River
Back Splashing
(After 1918, Steve split his time between Jesus and Thames RC.)

The Back Splash meant to try and make the blade enter the water at the full reach; but the blade must be rowed in and so lose some of that distance, and all oarsmen, however taught, do row the blade in when racing. I learnt to coach for rowing the blade in, thus hitting the water and the boat, in a rather curious way. The coach of our school four was away. He used to coach standing up, and we thought it would be fun to try and jerk him out of the boat as we started it. So we practised, and when he came back and said "Paddle," we went for it and nearly got him out. To my astonishment, he said, "Well rowed" as he floundered, and I realised that we had practised starting the boat in the quickest way; and so I changed from "drop the blade in" to "row the blade in" and so began what is now called the Jesus Bell Note. The best bit of coaching in a tub pair is to get the oarsmen to make the rail strike the coach in the back; it is the same thing. Similarly in an Eight the best thing is to get the crew to hit the cox in the back. This is rowing with a springing hit. One Cambridge Don coaching his college used to tell them to jerk their cox out of the boat.

The whole story of rowing is: let the oarsman learn his job. And what is his job? An oarsman's job is to work an oar to propel a boat. The whole of rowing begins and ends in concentrating on working the oar to propel the boat. If an oarsman concentrates entirely on this he will be quite unconscious of his body and consequently it will move correctly and it is only by allowing the body to work unconsciously that it will work to the best advantage.

That is the whole of my method of teaching rowing. It differs from the old method, which was an endeavour to make oarsmen hold and move their bodies in what the coach considered ideal positions. These positions were showy, holding the body straight and making it move in a jerky position that caught the eye but did not move the boat. The above shows the difference between my methods and the old teaching. In 1884, the No. 4 in our crew fell out a week before the races, and I started to tub a man to replace him. Necessity is the mother of invention, and I got into the tub pair and asked him to watch my blade and try to imitate it. In a very short time he rowed a very good blade, improving more than he would have done in a year of body-form coaching.

Since then I always tub in that way — starting by illustrating and criticising the work of my own blade, and then getting the other man to row on, while all three of us watch the blades working. When the other man takes my place I get him to work his blade and they each row one stroke at a time. Very soon both absolute beginners can tell which is the best stroke they rowed out of the last half-dozen, and they sense *what the blade is doing, and have forgotten all about the body*. I then explain that if they will continually confine their attention to working the blade to move the boat and sense what it is doing they can teach themselves far better than any coach can. Drawing attention to the body takes the attention off the oar. The easiest way to hold the body in position is to let off the work, and that is what happens when body-form is coached. Criticising my methods, the old school say that it is a short cut to rowing. Yes, and the body-form is a long cut away from rowing; Body-form coaching is teaching locomotor ataxy [the inability to precisely control one's own bodily movements. – P.M.].

The argument about styles in rowing has been going on for over fifty years, to my knowledge. In 1877 my eldest brother [George] came back from Cambridge and stroked the Melbourne Rowing Club and the first winning Inter-State crew. Two years after, another brother [Charlie], a winner of the Ladies' and Grand at Henley and the Boat Race, came back to Melbourne with Marriott, a five years' Oxford Blue [H.P. Marriott, two-time Boat Race winner, stroked the 1878 winner and the 1877 dead-heat. – P.M.]. They rowed with my eldest brother in the Melbourne crew. I heard them arguing about style; the later arrivals asked my eldest brother, "Why don't you row in the 'Varsity style?" He said: "Because the others can't, and you will find their style is better when you get into it." And they soon agreed. Next year [1880] another Cambridge Blue [C.N.L. Armytage, Geelong and Jesus. – P.M.] came to Melbourne and went through the same argument, with the same result. I heard these discussions and came to England, prepared to find the 'Varsity style not perfection. I found London and Thames winning most of the races at Henley and rowing differently from the 'Varsity style, much the same as the Melbourne crews, also Jesus College, Cambridge. Jesus men told me that W.B. Woodgate, criticising the Jesus style, said: "They would have won the 'Varsity Boat Race for the last ten years if they had not been hampered by the other colleges," and certainly they were much the most successful college at Henley in the seventies.

I rowed in the [1882] 'Varsity as a Freshman and found the coaching for style very bad. In fact, that was the worst crew I ever rowed in. My next crew was the Jesus College May Boat. All the old oars had gone except one. I tubbed the crew the first day, all Freshmen who had not rowed before except the old hand, the Captain [Arthur Middleton Hutchinson, 1860-1937, Cambridge Blue in 1881 and 1882. The two became lifelong friends. – P.M.]. It was only the other day that he told me that on our first outing, when turning for home I said to the coach: "Do you mind not speaking to the crew; your talking is upsetting their rowing." I had tubbed the crew to work their blades, and he was talking body-form. That is the difference between the old teaching and my method of coaching. The next day I took the crew to Ely and coached from the boat. I rowed in the 'Varsity Boat the next year [1883] but, finding the coaching even more against the grain, I refused to row the next year [1884] and went to Australia and was away from the Boat Race my fourth year [1885].

Coming back from Australia [1885], I won the College Pairs with the coxswain [C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe, 8 st. 9 lb. – P.M.]. A few weeks after, we won the Grand, so the cox and I beat several potential Grand Challenge winners. In the final of the Grand, we beat a crew that had beaten Leander in a heat. Leander had the six best oars in the previous Cambridge crew, and two very good old Cambridge Blues. So the crew I rowed in and coached, proved the superiority of my methods over the Cambridge style; especially did the difference in physique prove it, as Jesus had four men under 10 st. 7 lbs. and were lighter than any crew that has won the Grand since that time, 1885, with the possible exception of Christ Church in 1908, but no other. [The Author had previously made this statement without the possible exception (see "Some Secrets of Successful Rowing"), and had been "corrected" on the ground that the Christ Church crew of 1908 was lighter. The records vary on the weights of the Jesus 1885 crew [11 st. 3 lbs. at Henley], but all show them lighter than the Christ Church 1908 crew, which was heavier also than the Thames 1923 crew [11 st. 9¼ lbs.]. – I.F.] Surely it is an overwhelming proof of the advantage of my methods, when I, with the cox, can go and beat the rest of the crew, who then beat a crew that beat a crew better than that year's Cambridge crew. In the arguments on style that arose when I returned to coach at the beginning of this century, the critics said my crews were like the Belgian crews and the American and Australian crews. These countries won the Grand five times in the last ten years before the war — just when the argument was at its height.

Brittain, "The Jesus College Boat Club"

1885 Jesus College 1st Mays Boat
Head of the River, Grand Challenge Cup Winners

Top: 4 E.P. Alexander 12 st. 1 lb., Coach T.E. Hockin,
3 H.A. Armytage 10 st. 7 lb., 2 L.P. Bevan 10 st. 5 lb.,
Bow H.S.J.A. Sanford 10 st. 4 lb., 7 Steve Fairbairn 12 st. 13 lb.,
Bottom: Coxswain C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe 8 st. 9 lb.,
6 A.M. Hutchinson 11 st. 7 lb., Stroke C.H. Bicknell 10 st. 3 lb.,
5 J.W. Dickson 11 st. 2 lb.

These crews, and mine, rowed with the backs driven out round, and the arms elastic, and the slide starting back with a shoot, thus bellying the body out as the wind bellies out a sail. The old teaching kept the back straight, or rather arched, the arms held stiffly straight as long as possible, and the slide held till the shoulders were past it.

Teaching to shoot the slide or to bend the back or to go for any point would be fatal, and there is a tendency to do this now, especially to shoot the slide. [Fairbairn is referring to his purported followers teaching what became known at the Jesus Style, highly criticised by Orthodox coaches for varying from their preferred technique, also highly criticised by Fairbairn for coaching the body and not the oar. – P.M.] Coaches must stick to concentrating the oarsman on working the oar to move the boat, and so get an endless chain movement. I advocate keeping the crew concentrated on learning to work the oar to propel the boat. Crude oarsmen will apparently exaggerate these movements, but let them go on working the oar, and, as they do so, they will improve their rowing muscles, and as they improve, so will the oarsman's movements improve in appearance. "Row the oar into the water and hit the boat with your weight" is a main principle of my theories. The old teaching was "drop the oar in and then pull." Young and weak oars rowing the blades in will row a good deal of the stroke in the air, but as they get cleverer at the turns and their muscles get more powerful, they will grip the water nearer and nearer the dead centre. Trying to row the oar in at the full reach is simply asking the oarsman to bite off more than he can chew. Each oarsman's Subjective Mind knows what distance he should row the oar through the air, to generate sufficient momentum to carry the stroke through with an endless chain action, and the coach, interfering with that, jars the oarsman and makes him dislike rowing.

The successes of my crews have been continuous. To show the advantage of working the oar I will give them as briefly as possible. I coached my school boat from the boat to work the oars. We won the Inter-Schools Race of Victoria, a big event. After rowing at Cambridge I coached a few crews in Australia; all but one were winners. I coached and rowed in a Victorian Inter-State crew. They won very easily. Upward, the Victorian coach for many years, told me some years afterwards that that was the best crew ever seen in Australia. I coached Jesus from the boat when I rowed. They rowed Head four years, and won the Grand at Henley in 1885 — the only May Boat that ever won the Grand. At Henley in 1886 and 1887 all the winners but one crew had been through my hands and were working the oars to move the boat, no body-form. In 1888 and 1889 Thames won the Grand and the Captains wrote me that they owed their successes to my coaching.

I returned to coach Jesus in 1904. They went Head of the Lents and Mays, and have been Head more often than any other college since. Jesus second boats have bumped the first boats of all the other colleges except First Trinity, a college with over a thousand undergraduates against sixty-nine at Jesus when I started coaching in 1904. [The figures for 1905 given in "The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge", p. 275, are: Jesus 124, Trinity 671. – I.F.] Since then Jesus have been in the final of the Grand more often than all the other Cambridge colleges added together, and have won the Ladies' more often than any other college. They only rowed for the Ladies' when bumped from Head, and these crews were not so good as the crews that rowed for the Grand. Had they always rowed for the Ladies', they would have won it very frequently. During my coaching Jesus have had more Blues than any other Cambridge college except Trinity. Jesus has had very few men over 13 st. during my coaching, only four, and two of those were each said to be the best oar of their year in England; John Campbell [John Alan Campbell, 1899-1939, Church of England Grammar School and Jesus College, 13 st. 5 lbs., in 1920 won the Boat Race and

won Silver in the Olympic Eights. – P.M.] and John Bell [John B. Bell, 13 st. 3 lbs., Geelong and Jesus, Boat Race winner in 1926 and 1927. – P.M.]; and Eric Fairbairn [George Eric Fairbairn, 1888-1915, Eton and Jesus, 11 st. 13 lbs., nephew of Steve Fairbairn, in 1908 won the Boat Race and Silver in the Olympic Pairs. – P.M.], another of my pupils, was also said to be the best oar of his year.

I coached a few boys at Eton, about eight in all. Four of them got into the Eton eight, and most of the others, if not all, left Eton after I coached them before the next Eton eight appeared. I coached two Juniors for the Junior Pairs for ten days. At the end of that time they were put, one into the Eton eight, and the other into the Eton 2nd eight. The Eton rowing was good at that time, as they won the Ladies' Plate in three successive years [1910-12], so putting two juniors up over the heads of over 100 colours, showed the soundness of the coaching. A four I coached at Eton went Head.

I coached Thames after the war. They won the Senior eights at all the Regattas. Their juniors won two juniors' races, one or two years, a feat never done before. The second eight won the Thames Cup eights at the Regattas, and the Senior eights twice at Molesey Regatta, beating the first eights of the other clubs. Coached by myself and disciples of mine, Thames have won the Grand three times [1923, 1927, 1928] , their previous win being 1889 when the captain wrote me, saying that it was due to my coaching. I then coached London and, coached by my disciples, they have won the Grand three times. Their previous win of the Grand was forty years ago. In the last twelve years, Thames and London have six Grand wins, and Leander all the rest I think. Leander is the pick of the whole English rowing world, and has much more power to choose from than clubs or colleges. In the last Olympic Regatta [1932] an English crew won the Fours and Pairs, nearly all old pupils of mine and all rowing on my methods.

I came back three years ago, once more to help Jesus rowing, and I gave several other colleges talks on rowing, and several colleges got Jesus coaches, and practically the whole of the rowing is now concentrating on working the oars. In 1933 Cambridge colleges won five out of the eight races at Henley, London won two, and the other went abroad. So Henley was once more like it was in 1886 and 1887, the Regatta being won by crews rowing on my methods. Since writing the above, the Henley 1934 Regatta has been rowed, and Jesus won the Ladies' Plate six seconds under record in 6 minutes and 48 seconds. This time was also three seconds faster than the previous fastest ever done at Henley. There was unanimous opposition against my coaching for some years.

At last Selwyn, one of the smallest Cambridge colleges came over to my methods. They made bumps every night, and went up over twenty places, coming to third and fourth on the river in Lents and Mays. They got two Blues [A.S. Reeve, 1930, and Ran Laurie, 1934. Laurie, the 1948 Olympic Men's Coxless-Pairs Champion, later fathered actor Hugh Laurie, also a champion rower. – P.M.], the first Selwyn rowing Blues, and a cox got his Blue. I take more trouble than other coaches over coxswains, and Jesus have had a good many coxswain Blues, and the only cox I coached at Eton steered the Eton boat. Peterhouse, another small college, came over next and sailed up about twenty places, and got a Blue, and also a winner of the Diamonds [T.G. Askwith, 1932-33 Boat Race winner, 1933 Diamond Sculls. – P.M.]. Oriel, Oxford, coached by one of my disciples, J. H. Page, went up twenty places in four years, and rowed Head three nights. Since writing the above Oriel have rowed

Head at Oxford again for six nights. Other colleges at Oxford are also rowing on these lines, notably New College, and Balliol. Pembroke, Cambridge, coached by Archie Nisbet, one of my disciples, went Head in the Lent and May Races, and have won the Fours, Pairs, Double Sculls, and Sculls, at Cambridge, and produced many Blues. The four this year, a record breaker on the Cam, is the most successful. Finally, the fact of the colleges going for my methods has had a great deal to do with the success of Cambridge crews in the Boat Race.

Chat III

My Methods

A Jesus don, Tommy Watt, knew all about Jesus men's athletics, and was very keen on all athletics. He told me frequently that he asked all the Jesus men who had got Blues or Trial Eight caps during my coaching what they thought was the difference between my coaching and the coaching they got for their Blues or Trial caps; and he always got the same reply: "Just the difference between Heaven and Hell."

NO COACHING FOR BODY-FORM

The reason for this difference is that I coach men to concentrate entirely on learning to work their oars to move the boat and allow their bodies to work unconsciously. This at once passes the initiative to the individual oarsman, to take charge of his own rowing, and allowing the body to work unconsciously, I am certain from long experience, is the only way to get the body to move truly. Also not interfering with the body's movements, and not having to keep holding and moving it in set positions, is a great relief to the oarsman. The old teaching was entirely positioning and moving the body, and so each oarsman had to make his body sit and "move in positions to satisfy the man on the bank." Had these positions been correct it might have been possible to coach in this way, but they were mainly wrong. The main positions were, "hold the slide;" "keep the back straight;" "keep the arms straight;" "get the shoulders over." All these positions were stiff and tiresome, and *all were incorrect*. Hence the Hell of the old teaching. The irksomeness of having to think of the body was what made rowing a Hell. Even if the stiff positions taught had been correct for oarsmen who were normally made, they would have been impossible for oarsmen who varied from the normal with stiff joints or other freak physical defects. Many oarsmen have stiff joints, especially ankles, and to force them to keep their heels on the stretcher simply ruins their rowing. I have known two very good oarsmen with very stiff ankles. They allowed the heels to come right off and drove them into the stretcher, and so got reach and catch. I once coached an eight that won the Ladies' Plate at Henley, with the four stern oarsmen rowing very abnormally, owing to physical defects. Any body-form coach would have ruined their rowing by trying to correct their body-form, and then turned them out of the crew.

THE SUBJECTIVE MIND CONTROLS THE BODY

My crews all come to the same positions and have the same movements as far as physical defects will allow, and these movements are all the same as the movements of the finished first-class oarsman, but in a more crude state at first. But they "come to." I do not teach any positions. It has always been very noticeable to me that all first-class oarsmen gave up the "hold the slide," "keep the back straight," etc., and worked into the natural actions that my crews have. The same action can be seen on the Serpentine in Hyde Park being carried out by beginners in a still cruder form. The fact is that the Subjective Mind [The Subjective Mind acts entirely unconsciously, and has always controlled everyone's body movements. – I.F.] ["Man has two minds: the Objective Mind (conscious) and the

Subjective Mind (subconscious)." This was the first of three laws of psychic phenomena posited in 1893 by Thomson Jay Hudson, 1834-1903. – P.M.], and no one but the Subjective Mind, knows how to move the body to the best advantage, and beginners vary from perfection in the direct ratio of three things: one, their capacity to make the turns on to and off the feather correctly and generally their capacity to handle their oars correctly; two, the condition of their rowing muscles; and three, their physical defects.

MILEAGE MAKES CHAMPIONS

The whole of my teaching is teaching the oarsman how to work the oar correctly and then plenty of long rows, and plenty of racing crews together, to condition the muscles. When the abdominal muscles are got into condition the back will be springy and whaleboney. Before they are fit, if the oarsman drives hard, the back will go out too round. The body-form coach would say: "Keep your back straight." Not having the muscles fit to hold it straight and drive hard, the oarsman's only remedy would be to do less work. "Mileage makes Champions" is my main slogan. Searle, undoubtedly the best sculler the world ever saw, used to scull five miles to school every day as a boy, and no doubt that laid the foundation for his pre-eminent position in the rowing world. He went to Brisbane to scull a match. People came to see him and had to wait a very long time. They asked him how far had he gone. He said he took his first easy under the second bridge. That was seventeen miles away, so, if he only went eight miles further, that would be a fifty miles' outing.

THE BEST OARSMEN ROW IN THE BEST STYLE UNCONSCIOUSLY

As I have said, I have always noticed that the first-class oars departed from the stiff movements that were taught, and their movements became similar to what my crews come to. In the old days, two of Eton's best oarsmen varied from the traditional body-form and became outstanding oarsmen. The general criticism was, "What wonderful oars they would be if they rowed in style." Surely outstandingly good oarsmen must be rowing in the best style. Although all first-class oars departed from the old teaching, yet they never realised that they had done so. They were founded in the traditional showy body-form style and, as they went on, the Subjective Mind gradually took possession, and the oily, elastic, natural, endless chain movements came in without their realising it. That is where all the arguments about style began. They all thought they were holding the slide and getting the shoulders over. To get the shoulders over, the oarsman had to arch the back and throw the stomach forward. I have frequently sat beside a good oarsman, holding my hand in front of his stomach, and asked him to illustrate his swing. Back go the shoulders but forward comes the stomach and hits my hand, showing the style that he still thought he rowed in. This I point out to his great surprise. The Subjective Minds of all good oarsmen had corrected unconsciously the teaching of the old style, and they adopted correct natural action, but did not realise it. The Subjective Mind will work the body correctly if allowed to act unconsciously, and the Objective Mind will concentrate on the Object of rowing, which is learning to work the oar to propel the boat.

NECESSITY OF LEARNING THE ROUNDED MOVEMENT

That is the foundation of my coaching. The coach has a hard position to fill, and the lure of showy body-form movements is very apt to attract him. They are incorrect though showy. The better an oarsman rows, the less will the body movements show. The whole story is that an oarsman is a machine for propelling a boat. His capacity as a propeller is governed by the fitness of his rowing muscles, plus his ability to make the turns on to and off the feather correctly, and generally to work his oar correctly. Besides the turns on to and off the feather, which are sleight-of-hand movements, the oarsman must learn that the handle of the oar moves in the arc of a circle; and also striking the blade into the air at the finish and carrying it forward, blade balanced high, with the oar firmly on the sill of the rowlock, and rowing the blade into the water are rounded movements. I call this "turning mother's mangle" [In the United States, a "wringer", two rollers powered by a hand crank used to wring water from wet laundry. – P.M.]. The movement is like turning a wheel with a handle. So learn all these rounded movements and then plenty of long hard rows is the beginning and the end of rowing. Get the rounded movements of "turning mother's mangle" for striking the blade on to and from the balance at the ends of the stroke, and swing body and oar forward and back as if swinging on a door, hinged to a post.

DO NOT EXAGGERATE IN ORDER TO ROW LONGER

Coaches and oarsmen are very apt to try and exaggerate. Length is the main thing in rowing; so coaches and oarsmen are apt to try and get longer. Rowing is an endless chain movement. The diameter of that movement varies according to the oarsman's proficiency and fitness. I call it diameter to accentuate and possibly exaggerate the importance of the circular movements. The length of the oarsman's endless chain movement is what I call rowing to his strong point. Rowing true is the only way to learn, and to do this the oarsman must work the oar correctly and only row to his strong point. That is the point from which he can row his blade through with a springing hit, and elastic draw, *without feeling any heaviness or effort*. His Subjective Mind knows where his strong point is, and as he rows the blade through truly from his strong point, thus his strong point will become a longer point, till at last his strong point will be the longest point to which he can reach. Trying to row to a longer point — beloved by coaches and oarsmen — kills the endless chain movement, kills the rhythm or harmony. The weight comes off; the spring and momentum die; the oar is lugged through in jerks, and the stroke is dead and heavy. So, oarsman, row to your strong point, never bite off more than you can chew, and your rowing will improve quickly.

NO EXAGGERATIONS

Exaggerations are what kill coaching and rowing. Again, working for one point only is also apt to kill rowing. I know a club that was taught to row with the arms straight. The result was that the elbow joints were locked, and there was merely a push with the legs, as keeping the arms straight destroyed the Draw. The muscles down the back were not

used to carry the stroke home and keep the weight hanging on. Most of the club could get a splendid catch but no sustained Draw. It was a pitiful sight. They could row forty-five a minute, and the boat barely moved. The main difference between the style of crews that I coach and the old teaching was that my crews' slides moved very much faster at the Catch, their backs were driven out rounder, their arms bent elastically, and quicker than the old style crews. But it would be madness to teach "drive the slide fast;" "round the back more;" or "bend the arms quicker." Keep merely to learning to work the oar to move the boat, and never bite off more than you can chew.

My coaching consists of working round the foregoing, and I am writing these notes as a series of chats working round these points, just as I used to coach.

READING AND CONCENTRATING

Coaching needs a lot of repetition of the main points to drive them home, and some may think I repeat too much. But there may be men who require more repetition than the reader, or he may be wrong in his thought. Read it over again and see. I am writing this as a series of chats, doing away with the dullness of a text-book. I would recommend oarsmen to read a chapter nightly, the last thing before going to bed, or just before each row. When reading visualise yourself in a boat actually working the oar — that is very important. Reading like this is concentrating on working the oar to move the boat. I used to give notes to crews to read, and one reader got his Blue, and became President of the C.U.B.C. admittedly through reading and digesting those notes nightly. Concentration is the main point. Besides reading, an oarsman can help his rowing very much by thinking it all out. When I once was talking on this point to a man who had won his College Long Jump, he said, "I learnt my jumping, thinking it over in an arm chair after dinner." In talking with many keen oarsmen, I find that they frequently seem to have very muddled ideas on the subject. I fancy this is because they think there is some royal road to rowing. There is none; it is all plain common sense and will all come right quickly, if one concentrates on working the oar every stroke, to move the boat. One man I tubbed had been turned out of the College Crock Eights. I found he did not concentrate at all. I got him to concentrate, and he got into the 1st Lent Boat at once, then into the 1st May Boat the next term, then next term into the 'Varsity Trial Eights, and then next term — his fifth term — he won the Boat Race. Not concentrating; kicked out of college crews. Concentrating; a winning Blue in four terms.

THE NEXT STROKE IS THE RACE

So many oarsmen think that the daily row is all that is necessary. Many do not concentrate at all, and many wander at times. Rowing, I think, lends itself to this; as the rhythm begins to come, one is apt to go off into a dream just as music charms a snake. It is one's duty to one's college or club, to one's crew, and to oneself, to concentrate on and row the next stroke as well as possible. Every stroke well rowed means a better stroke next time, and so a better chance of winning the race. Every stroke well rowed is felt by all the crew and gives them confidence, and they consequently row their next stroke better; and every careless stroke rolls the boat and puts a nervousness through

the crew. So Victory or Defeat depend on the next stroke. The next stroke is the race, and the race will be merely an illustration of how you row the next stroke.

ENJOY YOUR ROWING

Towards the end of my active coaching career I coached for this a great deal; "Concentrate on and row the next stroke your best. That is the way to Victory." One year the Jesus crew lost the Grand by five feet, a heavy gust of wind striking them near the finish. I came to the crew as they lifted the boat out, and the captain called out: "Oh! Steve, we had a lovely row." That was the sweetest music I have ever heard. That frame of mind, to be pleased with the row when a gust of wind probably lost them the race, showed the true spirit, which can only follow having done your best always. Enjoying the row under those circumstances is the true Victory. Since I wrote "Rowing Notes" I have had very many letters from clubs saying they are rowing on that book and are much more successful, and always adding they are enjoying their rowing so much more. Enjoying every day's row is a much greater victory than getting first past the post in a race, and it is also the best way to learn to get past the post first.

THE RIGHT SPIRIT

Now, oarsmen, after your next race examine your frame of mind. If you lose and have enjoyed the row then you have done your best in practise for your club, your crew, and yourself. If you win and feel sympathy for the other crew that is the right spirit. My old friend Reeve [A.S. Reeve, Selwyn College, 1930 Boat Race winner, later assisted Steve at Jesus and coached at Gresham College. – P.M.] used always to begin to juniors, "It has all got to come from inside you, laddies." He was the most successful of all coaches, especially with juniors. He took over the Gresham Rowing Club, which had been rowing for over fifty years and had never won a race in a Regatta. In his first year of coaching Gresham beat eighteen crews before they suffered a defeat. Similarly with the Thames juniors which he always coached: the first year of my captaincy, two Thames crews of juniors won their races at Regattas that year, a feat never done before.

KEEP YOUR INITIATIVE

To coaches I would say, "See that you never do anything to stop it all coming from inside the laddies," and to oarsmen; "See that it comes from inside you." Never surrender your initiative. Don't sit idly waiting for the coach to wake you up, keep on watching what your oar is doing every stroke, and try to make it work better the next stroke. Teach yourself to work your oar to propel the boat, and you will teach yourself far better and quicker than any coach can teach you. A maxim of mine is: "You will never learn to race by rowing, and you will only learn to row by racing." So coach, see your crews get plenty of sprints with other crews. Thirty years ago, soon after I had begun to coach Jesus again, one Jesus oarsman would say to another: "Steve's up." The other would reply: "Another Regatta." And they would be more content with life. Something worth going to the river for — another regatta.

RACE TWO BOATS TOGETHER IN PRACTISE

My last few years of regatta rowing I rowed for Thames in the regattas after Henley, and we had some lovely races with London in the eights and Kingston in the fours. It was wonderful how we improved through these races. My coaching has always been: put the second crew in front of the first; that is the best coach the second crew can have, the bows of a faster boat chasing it. It keeps them concentrated. Then I used to give them plenty of races together, handicapping the second boat to get a level finish. Jesus and Thames' second boats showed the advantage of this work. Jesus second boats bumped the first boats of all the other colleges except First Trinity, and Thames second crew won the Thames Cup class event in the regattas for several years, and at the last regatta the Thames second crew won the Grand Challenge race at least twice, beating the first boats of the other clubs. Working two boats together makes both boats keener.

THE RELIGION OF ROWING

I have frequently got letters from men going down from college, thanking me for coaching them and often adding: "You have taught me more than rowing, you have taught me something that will help me through life." I could not understand this at all at first, but as the years roll by and one has passed the allotted span of three score years and ten [Steve was 72 years old when "Chats on Rowing" was published. – P.M.], one begins to see that just as all roads lead to Rome, so all through life the next stroke or the next act is the whole story. Do your best the next act always, and, when you come to view your life, it will be pleasant work if you do your best the next act always. The real religion of a boat club is: "be sure that the worst oar gets the best attention." The Jesus Boat Club is a very happy place to-day, and their lower boats show the best rowing. So in rowing, the Spirit is: "use the oar to propel the boat and forget the body."

DIFFICULTY OF EXPLAINING ABOUT ROWING

All rowing comes in through the Subjective Mind unconsciously. To put on paper the movements that are learnt unconsciously is a very difficult matter. I showed some rowing notes to two leading coaches. The notes were on the turns on to and off the feather. I had been writing that the wrists did not turn to make the movements, and they both asked me could I explain exactly what happened. After long thought, founded on a remark of Bossie Phelps: "You don't turn your wrists to feather; you roll the sculls in your hands," I eventually unravelled the movements that take place with the first-class oarsman. I give them later. It is very difficult to unravel these movements and become conscious of what really happens, but I have, I think, done so, and have explained in detail the whole of the movements that constitute a stroke. Realising the command the Subjective Mind takes unconsciously of the body has been the reason why I coach in my methods, and I think non-realisation of this important truth has been the reason for the old body-form coaching. All the old fast-looking movements of the body that caught the eye gave the appearance to the average individual of a quick and powerful-looking movement. This is entirely illusory, the longer, harder, and faster an oarsman applies his weight to move a boat, the smoother and more harmonious his movements will be,

and the less noticeable. It is the jerks of the showy movements and their stops that catch the eye. This is easily illustrated by swinging one's hand a distance first with half a dozen jerky stops, and then with one even movement. The jerky stopping hand will catch the eye much more than the evenly moving one. Producing this to infinity a perfect oarsman's movements would be invisible. It is possible that Tom Moss, Tom Hockin [T.E. Hockin, Radley and Jesus, Cambridge Blue from 1876 to 1879, rowing directly behind Charlie Fairbairn in 1879. – P.M.], David Brown [David Edward Brown, b. 1858, 3-time winner of the Boat Race for Oxford, beating Cambridge with Fairbairn aboard in 1882, also multiple winner at Henley. – P.M.], Gulston [Francis Stepney Gulston, 1845-1917, one of the greatest British rowers of the 19th Century, 10-time winner of the Stewards' Challenge Cup, 5-time winner of the Silver Goblets and the Grand Challenge Cup, coach at Kingston Rowing Club. – P.M.] Frank Playford [Frank Lumley Playford, 1855-1931, London Rowing Club, winner of the Diamond Sculls in 1876. – P.M.], Jimmy Hastie [James Hastie, 1848-1897, Thames Rowing Club, a particular hero of Fairbairn's, winner of the Silver Goblets in 1877, 1880 and 1881, author of "Genesis of Rowing". – P.M.], etc., have now become perfect oarsmen and are rowing so true that they and their boats are invisible. [This is the elderly Steve Fairbairn at his most sentimental. All the men he mentioned had already passed away. – P.M.]

Chat IV

Style

My landlady recently told me that her son stammered. I asked whether he wanted as a child to write left-handed, and whether she taught him to write right-handed. “Yes,” she said. The same story in her son’s son; he stammered and had wanted to write left-handed and had been forced to write with the right hand. There we get coaching through the body and its results. No one but each person’s Subjective Mind knows how to work the body, and the Subjective Mind acts entirely unconsciously; the movements of the body in rowing, and in everything, should be left to be controlled by this unconscious action; otherwise stammering will result.

DON’T FORCE THE OARSMAN

Forcing people to hold their bodies in certain positions only makes them let off the work to assume these positions; further, it is irksome, and so they become bad oars and hate rowing. My crews, taught to take the initiative and concentrate entirely on working their oars to move the boat, have been phenomenally successful. But their success has been small in comparison to their enjoyment of rowing. So in rowing and in all teaching, the art is getting the learner to use his initiative to teach himself. It has always been astonishing to me to note the way youth hates the lessons taught at school, and undergraduates hate their work at the universities. It is because, in some way, education is forcing them to write with the wrong hand, and so sets up a jar that brings in a stammering mentality, instead of the endless-chain, smooth and continuous flow that teaching scholars to use their initiative to learn brings in. This latter method would make youth love their lessons as much as they hate them now.

NO FIXED BODY-FORM, PATTERN OR STYLE

I have been accused of inventing a style of rowing. This is quite incorrect. The fundamental principles of the style of rowing are not subjects of controversy. [English Orthodox coaches of the early 20th Century and Modern Orthodox coaches of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries would strongly disagree. – P.M.] The oarsman is a rowing machine that moves a boat by working the oar correctly. Oarsmen are not identically the same machine. Some have stiff joints, and other variations. So all cannot be brought to the same body-form pattern. In 1928 a Jesus crew won the Ladies’ Plate at Henley. The four stern oars varied from the normal style because of their physical defects. Owing to their physical conformation, it would have been impossible to drill them into the ordinary body-form pattern, and the old body-form coach by trying to do so would have ruined their rowing. None of them would have been left in the crew with a body-form coach, and yet the stroke [D.J.S. Mackinnon. – P.M.] was as fine an oarsman as there ever was on the Cam or at Henley; and he rowed with his knees shut because his back was so abnormally long. He also rowed with his right arm very far away from the body. This last position is correct, but rarely seen, though his elbow was possibly unnecessarily far away from the body to be correct for an ordinarily built oarsman.

OARSMEN VARY, LET THEIR SUBJECTIVE MINDS ALONE CONTROL

So there we get a principle. An oarsman is a machine to move a boat, but the position and movements of the body vary from the normal in different oarsmen, according to their physical variations from the normal.

The mind that governs the movements of the body is what [Thomson Jay] Hudson, in his book "The Law of Psychic Phenomena" [1892], calls the Subjective Mind. It works entirely unconsciously, and it, and only it, knows how to move the body to the best advantage. No coach can possibly possess this knowledge and so when he coaches in opposition to the Subjective Mind's unconscious knowledge he jars on the oarsman. Brilliant oarsmen feel this most. Possibly the most brilliant oarsman Eton has produced gave an example of this by running away from school to London after a row. One of Australia's best oarsmen used to disappear for days together from the same reason. One of the most successful oars Cambridge ever had hated every day's rowing at his school, though he won his School Sculls — perhaps he enjoyed that — and he won the Ladies' Plate for his school at Henley. Then he came to a college coached on the lines of "work the oar and allow the body to move as it wishes unconsciously," and he enjoys every stroke he rows now, and seems practically invincible in a boat. A stroke of the Eton eight who had had teaching on these lines before he went to school asked me if he could give up rowing. The body-form teaching jarred him.

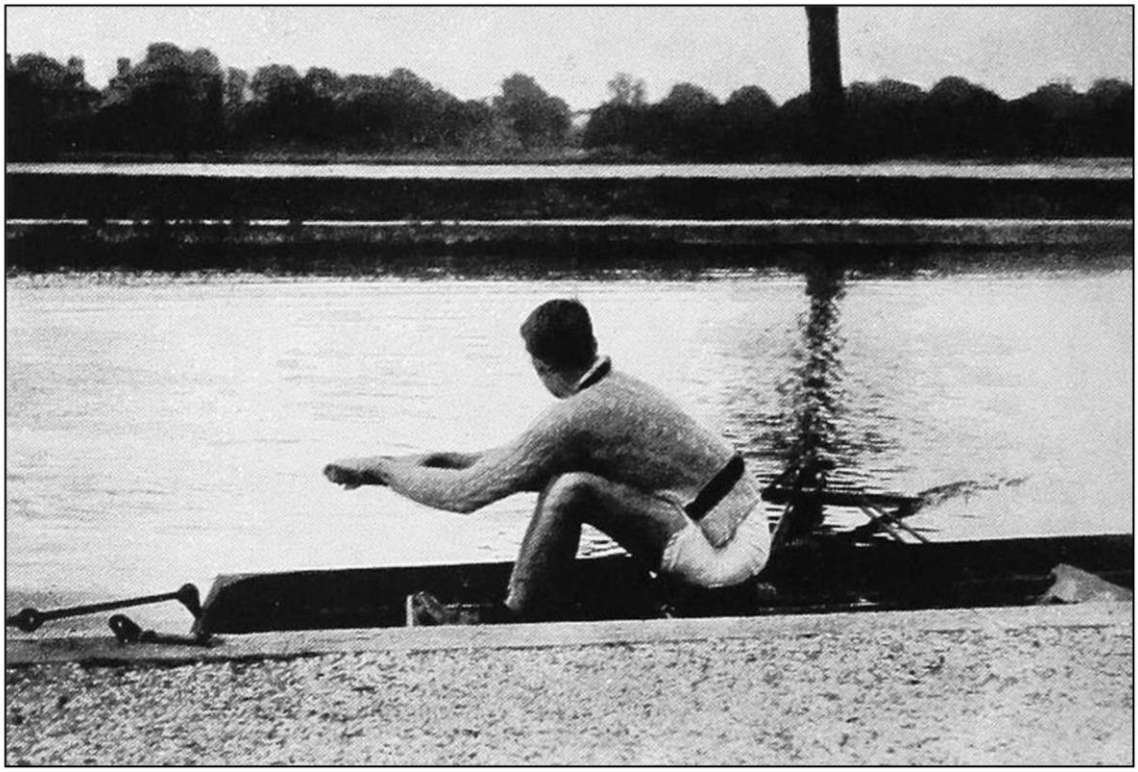
TEACH THE OARSMAN TO WORK THE OAR

These four men were amongst the most brilliant oarsmen that ever rowed (the word "amongst" rather underrates them). It is especially the brilliant oarsmen that body-form coaching jars. Of course, it would not if it were correct, but the old coaching was full of stiff showy movements which were far from correct for the normally built oarsman and, as I say, no coach can possibly know the best position for all if for any oarsman's body. Concentrating on working the oars and freedom from forced body positions are the main things in my coaching. The main thing is the use of each oarsman's initiative. I teach them to learn to work the oar themselves. So they can teach themselves and not sit in stilted positions, waiting for further instructions as to their bodies' positions from the man on the bank.

BY WORKING THE OAR, THE ENDLESS CHAIN MOVEMENT COMES IN

Oarsmen, taught to concentrate on working the oar, start the slide with an initial movement that stretches the body right out, and drives the small of the back out round and elastic like a piece of whalebone, and the hands grip and pull at the oar elastically and alive from the start of the stroke. This fast sliding and whaleboney rounded back drives the weight so that the oarsman feels it on the lower part of the back, and so the weight of the whole of the body is applied at once, and the elastically bending arm is

applying the weight of the body to the oar to propel the boat at once. By pulling with this elastic draw, the whole of the weight of the body is lifted on to the oar to propel the boat, and by sustaining this pull the hands keep drawing the oar in towards the body and thus sustain the full application of the weight.



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Note the elastically bending arm drawing the springing body on to the oar.

Also, by learning to draw the oar with elastic and alive bending arms, the oarsman learns to apply *and keep applied the whole of the weight of the body*. He learns to get the whip round the turn that sustains the full weight on the oar to the finish of the stroke, and, further, the last pull combines with a hook of the toes and pulls the body forward. This forward pull of the body imparts its weight into the last stroke, and so keeps the boat running between the strokes, and it allows the body to float forward at absolute rest ready to gather on and spring off the stretcher again. But what is best is that the last pull holds the weight on the rowlock, and the weight is practically never on the seat. That is what oarsmen come to when concentrating on working the oar to move the boat. It is an endless-chain movement, a continuous flowing movement, only to be got by allowing the body to work unconsciously, and so with no restrictions.

A number of good oarsmen have written to me after trying my theories, saying, “What a wonderful revelation!” Practically all the rowing is done now with a driven-out slide and back, and a live elastic arm. The Cambridge college rowing is all conducted on the lines I advocate, also the Metropolitan rowing. It was the same in 1886 and 1887, when the whole of the races of those two Henley Regattas were won by crews rowing with natural

action, and all but one had been through my hands. But when I returned to rowing, all the old body-form showy movements had crept in with another more showy and more awful movement, called “Lively Recovery”, which put rowing into a pitiable state. So I am starting this book with this explanation, hoping that the showy body-form movements will never creep in again. The old school have been arguing against my methods for a long time, but my crews keep winning.

TWO EXAMPLES OF MISUNDERSTANDING

I will give two examples of two very famous oarsmen who were exceptionally good illustrations of the style of my teaching, but who clung to the old teaching being right. One gave a lecture on rowing and said that he divided rowing into three styles, the “orthodox”, the “opportunist” and the “Steve” styles. He said he called himself an “opportunist”, because he found he could row best with a fast running slide and a driven-out back. This showed loyalty to his old teaching, but he really said, “I can’t hold my slide or keep my back straight, so I can’t row in the orthodox style, so I call myself an opportunist.” The fast-moving slide and the driven-out back were the two main points where the style to which my crews come differed from orthodoxy. It seemed to me that it was loyalty to the old teaching (and not to the best interests of rowing), that prevented him from saying straight out, “I rowed in the ‘Steve’ style.” The other man, also a very fine oarsman, rowing in the style to which my crews come, while criticising the freak Jesus crew that won the Ladies’ Plate, said: “In the Jesus style, the slides were on the back stop, and the blades past the rowing-pins, before they took the water.” A terrific exaggeration; also an unfortunate statement, because that crew of oarsmen — far from stylish — won the Ladies’ Plate, beating all the best schools and colleges. That means beating all the orthodoxly taught English rowing. So, if he were correct, a crew of clumsy-looking oarsmen (as they were really), giving away three-quarters of their power, could beat all the best English schools and colleges. So how bad the English teaching must have been.

LET THE OARSMAN WORK THE OAR WITH HIS OWN NATURAL ACTION

As I say, my methods produce crews with fast-moving slides and rounded backs. But I do not teach men to shoot the slides or to round the backs; it is merely that natural action produces these movements. Teaching to do any of these movements would break the rhythm and ruin the rowing. Teaching to shoot the slide or to bend the back or to go for any point would be fatal, and there is a tendency to do this now, especially to shoot the slide. Coaches must stick to concentrating the oarsman on working the oar to move the boat, and so get an endless-chain movement. Never work for a point only; that is fatal. I advocate keeping the crew concentrated on learning to work the oar to propel the boat. Crude oarsmen will apparently exaggerate these movements, but let them go on working the oar; and, as they do, they will improve their rowing muscles; and, as they improve, so will the oarsman’s movements improve in appearance.

“Row the oar into the water and hit the boat with your weight” is a main principle of my theories. The old teaching was “drop the oar in and then pull.” Young and weak oars rowing the blades in will row a good deal of the stroke in the air, but as they get cleverer at the turns and their muscles get more powerful, so will they grip the water nearer and nearer the dead centre. Trying to row the oar in at the full reach is simply asking the oarsman to bite off more than he can chew. Each oarsman’s Subjective Mind knows what distance he should row the oar through the air, to generate sufficient momentum to carry the stroke through with an endless chain action; and the coach, interfering with that, jars the oarsman and makes him dislike rowing.

Chat V

Initiative

"It has all got to come from inside you, laddie" was the start of Reeve's coaching. He was the most successful coach, especially with juniors, and it was instilling this maxim that made his success. He coached many different clubs and always successfully. He coached Gresham [College], who had been a rowing club for over fifty years and never won a race. When he coached, they beat eighteen crews before they were beaten. The Senior Partners have told me that since Reeve took them in hand, the rowing men in the office had become the steadiest and best men in the firm. I have had a similar letter from the Master of Jesus, saying that the tone in Jesus College is recognised as the best in the 'Varsity, and that that is due to my coaching. Teaching an oarsman "it has all got to come from inside you, laddie" throws the responsibility on to him to take charge of his own rowing, and to use his own initiative; and it teaches him to try and work his oar better every stroke.

CONCENTRATE ON WORKING THE BLADE

Rowing is merely doing your best to work your oar to move the boat every stroke. If a man realises that he has to take charge of his own rowing, he will then learn to concentrate properly and to feel what his blade is doing, and he will try and do better next stroke. The next stroke is really the race, and the race is only an illustration of how the crew rowed the next stroke. So every man should be ready and determined to do his very best the next stroke to row his oar to propel the boat the best he can. As he does that, he will row each stroke better than the previous one. Many oarsmen go down to row just with the idea of an outing, thinking that they always row the same, and that they are a fixed quantity as oarsmen; that is to say, that they will always be of the same rowing capacity, or that perhaps each outing will improve them a little. Thus they will just contentedly slop along, thinking the coach will do all the improving, and so waiting for the coach to tell them something to improve them. Not only do they go along daily in this humdrum way, but rowing has a strange knack of destroying an oarsman's power of concentration. Probably that is because, as the feeling of rhythm or harmony begins to come, it charms the oarsman to sleep as a snake is charmed by music, and so the oarsman drops off, and is doing harm to his rowing and to the crew.

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT POSSIBLE BY CONCENTRATION

Rowing is really like climbing a high mountain, if one concentrates. As one climbs one sees a peak ahead, and thinks that is the top. When he arrives there, another peak appears and so on *ad infinitum*. So in rowing, as one concentrates on working the oar to move the boat, he feels a fresh power come in, and he thinks he has reached the top. But again he feels an improvement come in and so on. There are always heights in the distance to be found out by working the oar and sensing and feeling that one is doing

his best to move the boat. New feelings of increased power and ease keep coming in, and so one climbs the heights of the rowing mountain. He never reaches the top; as he reaches height after height he realises there are more heights to climb. I fancy the same principle applies right through everything in this world and a good solid religion is: "Whatever your hand finds to do, be sure you are going to do your best, next stroke."

HARD WORK

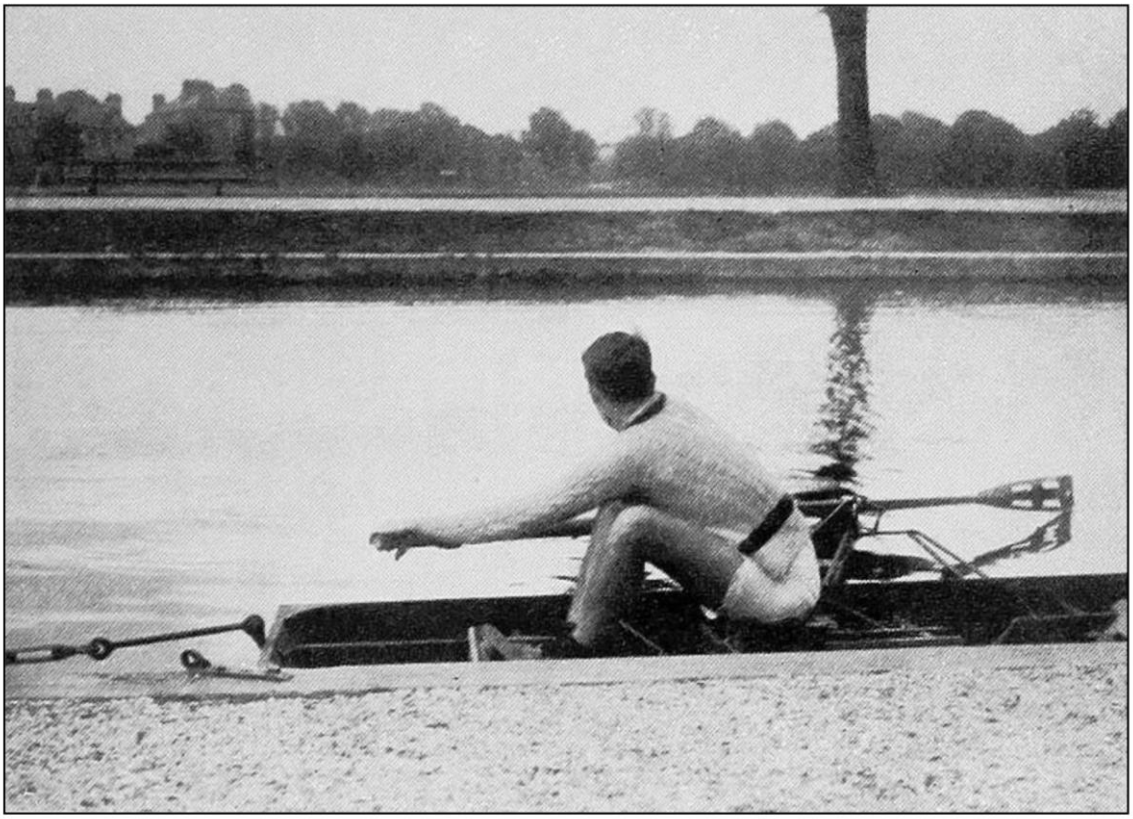
Honest hard driving of the oar is the only road in rowing. The young oar will drive his back out round if he works hard. That is because his abdominal muscles are not conditioned enough, and they are the most necessary muscles for rowing. As he works hard and develops those muscles, gradually the body will assume the whaleboney action that the finished oarsman's body has. Again, driving hard off the stretcher will drive the slide away very fast, and all beginners, if allowed to row naturally, will drive the slide away fast. Springing off the stretcher drives the slide away and starts the body moving; and, if one had no oar and went through the correct spring off the stretcher, he would spring over the bows of the boat. Springing off the stretcher is supplying the power of the moving body to propel the boat.

A FIRM GRIP
AN ELASTIC SPRING

To use this power the oarsman has to grip the oar firmly, with the body taut and braced, and with the hands pull the whole of this moving weight on to the oar with the arms elastically alive; and then he must sustain this draw at the oar and push at the stretcher to the finish of the stroke. Thus, as one comes forward to compress on and spring off the stretcher, he must have the body taut and braced and the oar elastically gripped, ready to apply the springing weight to the oar; and, as he pulls his driving weight on to the oar, he rows the oar against the rowing-pin and at the water, which he drives away with his blade; and that driven water reacts and presses against the oar and the rowing-pin, and so propels the boat. It is the reaction of the water pressing against the blade that drives the boat.

FEEL WHAT THE BLADE IS DOING

The oarsman must sense this feeling of what his blade is doing with the water and what the water is doing with the blade. That is the beginning and end of learning to row. As he senses this feeling, his rowing will improve. But to think about holding or moving his body in certain positions takes away from his capacity to work the oar to drive the water away and get the reaction of the water to drive the boat. Body positions and movements are made most easily by letting the work off and those positions are showy and false. On the other hand, by working the oar to move the boat, the body moves easily and elastically, smoothly and continuously.



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"The elastic spring and the steely fling
That drives the flying craft."

DON'T COACH FOR BODY MOVEMENTS

I want to impress that my method with the young oarsman produces very often a slide shot too far, and a back bent too round, and an arm bent too quickly. But these all smooth out as the draw muscles and the abdominal muscles get conditioned. Just as it is bad to tell a man to hold his back straight, so it is bad to say "Shoot the slide back fast." Just as he will stop the work to hold the back straight, so will he delay applying the work to let the slide run further. My crews all come to (but are not coached for) similar positions: a fast-moving slide that drives the body out stretched and a whaleboney rounded back. But I do not coach for any movement of the body. That has all got to come from inside you, laddie, and it comes unconsciously through the Subjective Mind's unconscious action. To move correctly the body must move unconsciously. I coach entirely to work the oar to move the boat. Everyone has moved their bodies unconsciously all through their lives. Becoming body conscious is the first step towards locomotor ataxy.

GOOD OARSMEN CONCENTRATE ON THE BLADE AND THEIR BODIES WORK NATURALLY

I have noticed for the last fifty years that all first-class oarsmen have this initial shoot of the slide and the driven out whaleboney back — just the same action to which all my crews come — though in a more polished form than the junior oar. Still, they all have these correct natural positions. The good oarsman realises and concentrates on the object of rowing, which is to propel the boat, and so forgets his original teaching, and his movements become true*, though he does not realise that he makes the movements that have crept in unconsciously, and he thinks he is still rowing as a body-form pattern oarsman*. All first-class oarsmen concentrate on working the oar to move the boat. Oarsmen can learn a lot by reading "Rowing Notes". I mean, of course, reading intelligently; reading as if he were rowing and going through the motions as if rowing all the time; reading and criticising, not reading and becoming a slave to what the notes say; realising that it has all got to come from inside you, laddie, and not learning notes on rowing by heart. I would strongly recommend oarsmen to read a chapter of this book every day and test it out in their rowing by trying out the points.

WHAT MUST COME FROM INSIDE YOU

Now what has got to come from inside you is this: Learn to sense what your blade is doing; Feel it strike the water with a true note; then make it drive the water away as fast and as far as you can. And with a "throw the boat away" at the finish, whip the oar round the turn so that the oar spins into the next stroke, and see that the water comes up boiling at the finish of the stroke.

Watch your blade to find out what it is doing, and then shut your eyes and sense the feeling of what it does, and keep on making the blade cut through the water and bring up the water boiling more and more. Rowing with the eyes shut opens the eyes to rowing more than anything else will.

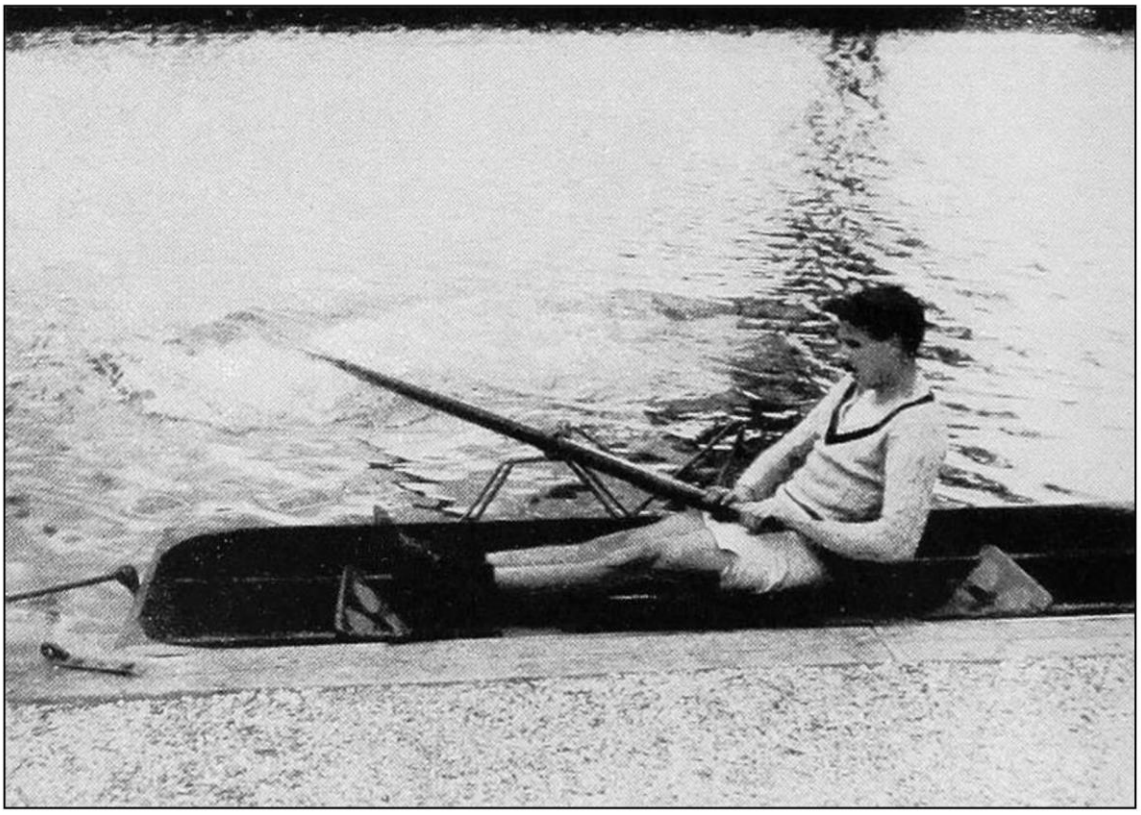
That is what has to come from inside you, and never lose your concentration on working your oar to produce this result.

THE ART OF COACHING

Many young oarsmen, on reading the foregoing, will wonder what notice are they to take of the coach. Isn't anything to come from inside him? Yes, give everything the coach says a chance, but do not slavishly follow it and resign your initiative to him. The coach has a very hard position; naturally he wants to see everyone row like the perfect oar, and the lure of showy movement is apt to attract his coaching. So he may not be suggesting the right thing for you, even if he were for the average oar, as your physical infirmities may preclude you from making the movements he wishes.

DON'T FOLLOW THE COACH SLAVISHLY

When the coach asks you to do something, try and do it, work at it, and examine it, and you can find out for yourself whether it is right or wrong, and make up your mind as to whether it would be good or bad to do what the coach has said. Never surrender your



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"The willowy sway of the hands away
And the water boiling aft."

initiative. The art of coaching is never to talk to individuals in the crew; simply give the crew something to do as a crew. That something should always be urging the crew to propel the boat faster. He can do that in many various ways such as: "spring at her," "throw her away," "drive the blades right through," "float out," "let her run," etc., etc. If the coach wants to correct some fault in an individual, let him take him in a tub, and apply the principle that the oarsman is breaking, but never tell him he has a fault. The only time the coach should talk to the individual is when he sees him improving. Then he will do the oarsman a lot of good by telling him he is rowing better. Never tell a crew or individuals that they are rowing better unless it is true. I am a great believer in telepathy; the coach's thought will pass to the crew. I can see the best an oarsman can come to, and it is wonderful how he responds and comes to that best. I always hope for and believe in that best arriving, and I advise coaches to hold that thought. So once more, "it has all got to come from inside you, laddies."

NO CARELESS STROKES

Do your best every stroke; a careless stroke reflects through the crew and does harm; a careless stroke does harm to you and your crew and your club and college. The harm of a careless stroke will reflect through the ages, doing harm, just as a good stroke will, doing good. Enjoy every stroke — only done by concentration and doing your best.

Chat VI

Lateral pressure and turns of the oar

KEEP THE BUTTON UP

A leather sleeve and "button" on the loom of a vintage oar.

The first thing the oarsman should learn is Lateral Pressure. This is pressing the button of the oar against the rowlock all through the stroke. This is screwing the engine — that is the oarsman — into its bed. If the oar is pressed against the button firmly all through the stroke, it holds the oarsman firm, and then he can hold the boat firm. By pressing the button against the rowlock the oarsman swings forward as if swinging on a door hinged to a post, whereas if the button is not held firmly against the rowlock, the oarsman at once becomes sloppy and loses touch with and control of the rigger. *The handle of the oar moves in a segment of a circle*. As the oar starts to move forward, it moves outwards; until it comes to a right angle with the rowlock, there is no danger of its coming away from the rowlock, but from there till forward — and similarly from there till back in the stroke — if the button is not pressed firmly against the rowlock, it will come away from the rowlock, and then the oarsman becomes floppy and loses control of his body and of the boat. So it is very important to realise that the oarsman must keep pressing the button against the rowlock.

SPIN THE OAR ROUND THE TURN

This pressure is exercised by the thumb and little finger of the inside hand (which is the hand nearest to the rigger). The oar is held by the fingers, not gripped in the palms of the hands. The fingers are the strongest grip and full of touch. Clasping the oar in the palm of the hands is clumsy. The thumb and little finger of the inside hand exercise a controlling hold, and turn or roll the oar on to and off the feather. As the oar nears the finish, the fingers of the inside hand start a rotary movement, turning the oar on to the feather. This rotary movement is made as if one were going to spin the oar round and round, but it is just an instantaneous action all done in a flash, just long enough to roll the blade on to the feather. It is a backward and downward movement, rowing the blade out of the water at the finish, and then a still downward but forward movement striking the blade into the air by striking on to the sill of the rowlock. It is all a rounded turn. The

blade is rowed into the air and feathered with the rotary movement of the fingers, as if trying to spin the blade round and round. This rowing the blade down and out, with that last “throw her away” at the finish, not only runs one stroke into the next with the spinning endless-chain movement, but also gives the momentum to the body that swings it forward at rest. Thus it propels the boat by this forward swing of the next stroke and allows the body to float forward at perfect rest, in the correct position to gather on and spring off the stretcher. The blade, having been rowed into the air with a backward and downward movement with the fingers of the inside hand, is then driven forward for the next stroke by a still downward but now forward movement of the oar. The oar is struck downward and forward by the ball of the inside hand. (That is that part where the fingers join the palm.) The handle of the oar has been rolled or thrown from the fingers with a still backward movement into the ball of the hand and then struck forward. It is all a rounded swinging movement, the blade being rowed into the air with a swinging sweep.

FLICK THE BLADE INTO THE AIR

That is the finishing turn, and the most difficult portion of the stroke to get correctly. It takes many years to learn, partly because it has never been described. It comes into the oarsman’s rowing through the Subjective Mind unconsciously. An oarsman rows better after ten years’ rowing than after five because this turn is slowly becoming correct. Old oarsmen will be seen at Henley making a peculiar movement of one hand. They are executing this turn, and with a backward and downward rotary movement of the fingers of the inside hand they are feathering and flicking the blade into the air, and rolling the handle of the oar from the fingers to the ball of the hand, and striking the handle still downward but now forward. At this instant, every movement of every part of the body is reversed. From driving with the legs and pulling with the hands, and driving the body back and the oar through the water as far and as hard as one can, now the body is floating forward at rest. In the same way the blade is transferred from square to feathered and is floating forward in the air. If the beginner devotes a lot of study and practise to this turn, and to the turn when forward, his rowing will have a true foundation, and he will improve very much more quickly.

THE OAR DRAWS YOU FORWARD

The forward turn is exactly the opposite of the turn at the finish. The oar is propelled forward by the ball of the inside hand. It is held balanced on the sill of the rowlock. The oarsman should feel that the oar is drawing him forward. The momentum imparted to the oar at the catch should be such that the handle of the oar is drawn in towards the body, and the oar should be kept spinning at such a pace that it is drawn into the body and sent away from the body at an even pace, just that much faster than the body is moving necessary to make the oar arrive in towards the body just as the body is finishing its backward swing. In the same way the oar should move evenly forward so much faster than the body is moving, so as to arrive forward just as the body has completed its forward swing. The “throw-her-away” whip round the turn should carry the oar round the turn with a momentum, so that the oarsman, floating forward, balanced,

leaning on his oar, feels it drawing him forward. The correct feeling for the oarsman should be, “feel the blade in your hands, and feel the blade leading and drawing you forward.” Just the same as in golf: “let the clubhead lead, and feel the clubhead in your hands.”

FLICK THE BLADE SQUARE

When the oar has arrived full forward — the blade being held on the feather till full forward — the oarsman with a rolling forward — or throwing movement — rolls the oar from the ball of the hand into the fingers, rolling the blade square with a forward and upward movement. The blade is turned to just past a right angle with the water, and the loom of the oar makes contact with the rowing-pin. The oarsman must take special care that he has turned the blade past the right angle with the water; and that the bottom part of the loom of the oar has made contact with the rowing-pin. He must make especially sure that this contact of the bottom part of the loom of the oar with the rowing-pin is held throughout the stroke. Making and holding this contact is the most important point in timing and control. The blade is flicked square by a manipulation of the thumb and little finger of the inside hand, and is held firmly against the rowing-pin by this same manipulation. Just in the same way the thumb and little finger of this hand control the rotary movement on to the feather at the finish.

HOLD THE OAR FIRM AGAINST THE ROWLOCK

Making and holding contact with the bottom part of the loom of the oar is most important. The beginner cannot do better than row many strokes confining his attention throughout the stroke to the bottom part of the loom of the oar where it meets the button. (By the loom of the oar, I mean the back of the oar, that part that goes against the rowing-pin; I was once told the loom is not the correct name for this part.) Anyway, let the oarsman watch that part, i.e. the back of the oar against the button, and let him row many strokes watching this part throughout the stroke. On the forward swing this part lies on the sill. The oarsman should not let it lie floppily, but should hold it controlled, holding the oar balanced and pressing the button firmly against the rigger, ready to flick it square when right forward.

DON’T SQUARE TOO SOON

Many crews are coached to turn off the feather too soon. The oar should be held feathered till right forward, thus holding a firm and evenly balanced weight on the sill all the time, and giving stability to the boat. Turning off the feather too soon is very apt to alter the weight of the oar on the sill and make the boat unsteady.

LIFT YOUR WEIGHT ON TO THE STRETCHER

By holding the blade feathered till right forward the oarsman then, with a forward and rising flick of the oar, lifts its weight off the sill, and at the same moment, with a rising and forward movement, he lifts his weight off the seat and transfers it on to the

stretcher. At this moment the oarsman should be balanced on the stretcher and against the rigger with a truly exercised Lateral Pressure. If at this instant the seat and the sill of the rowlock vanished, the oarsman should sustain himself on the stretcher and on the rowing-pin. So let the oarsman come forward with the thought that he is going to lift the oar off the sill of the rowlock and himself off the seat, and sustain himself on the stretcher by his Lateral Pressure on the rowlock.

AN ELASTIC SPRING

From this position, the blade truly square and the bottom part of the loom of the oar having made contact with the rowing-pin, the oarsman — braced and taut, gathered on the stretcher — springs elastically off the stretcher, rowing his blade into the water by drawing at the oar with live elastic arms. The body is sprung off the stretcher, and the feet keep pushing the body off the stretcher all through the stroke.

PULL WITH HANDS

The hands pull at the oar and pull the blade against the water, and pull all this back — driven weight against the water. By keeping drawing at the oar, the hands keep this propelling weight drawing the boat along. The oarsman, as he springs, should pull at the oar in such a way as to drive away the water that is against the blade.

SPIN THE OAR INTO THE NEXT STROKE

He should pull the oar into his body sufficiently faster than the body is travelling, in order to row the oar so that it arrives home just as the body has arrived fully back; and the oar should spin round the turn and spin into the next stroke with one even pace, so that the oar arrives fully forward just as the body has arrived fully forward. This endless chain evenness of movement of body and oar constitutes Rhythm.

LIGHTNING RAPIDITY OF THE TURNS

This turn when finishing and the turn when forward are done in a flash by oarsmen who have learnt by these movements of the hand to work the oar correctly. Some of the best oarsmen seem to slice their blade in. That is because the quickness of the hand deceives the eye. On a launch once three of us noticed this quickness of the stroke's oar at the finish. The crew were rowing a three-mile course and just finishing; the blade of stroke's oar was not visible for the first five feet after it left the water. That illustrates the rapidity with which one can make these turns when he has learnt the Lateral Pressure — which gives the spring — and the true manipulation of the thumb and little finger of the inside hand — which makes the turns true. This Lateral Pressure and the correct manipulation of the oar by the thumb and little finger of the inside hand which rolls the oar on to and off the feather and holds the oar pressing firmly against the rowlock, not only give lightning rapidity to the spinning endless chain movement of the oar but put the oarsman in the right position throughout the stroke. He swings forward truly as if swinging on a door hinged on to the rowlock. Once the Lateral Pressure is

learnt, and the oarsman can bring his oar forward pressed by the ball of the inside hand, and turn it, and hold it pressing the rowlock by the thumb and little finger of the inside hand, he has nothing more to learn, and no one can teach him anything. I say he has nothing more to learn because he has learnt how to move his body all his life, and it will move correctly if he concentrates on working the oar to move the boat.

SLEIGHT-OF-HAND TRICKS

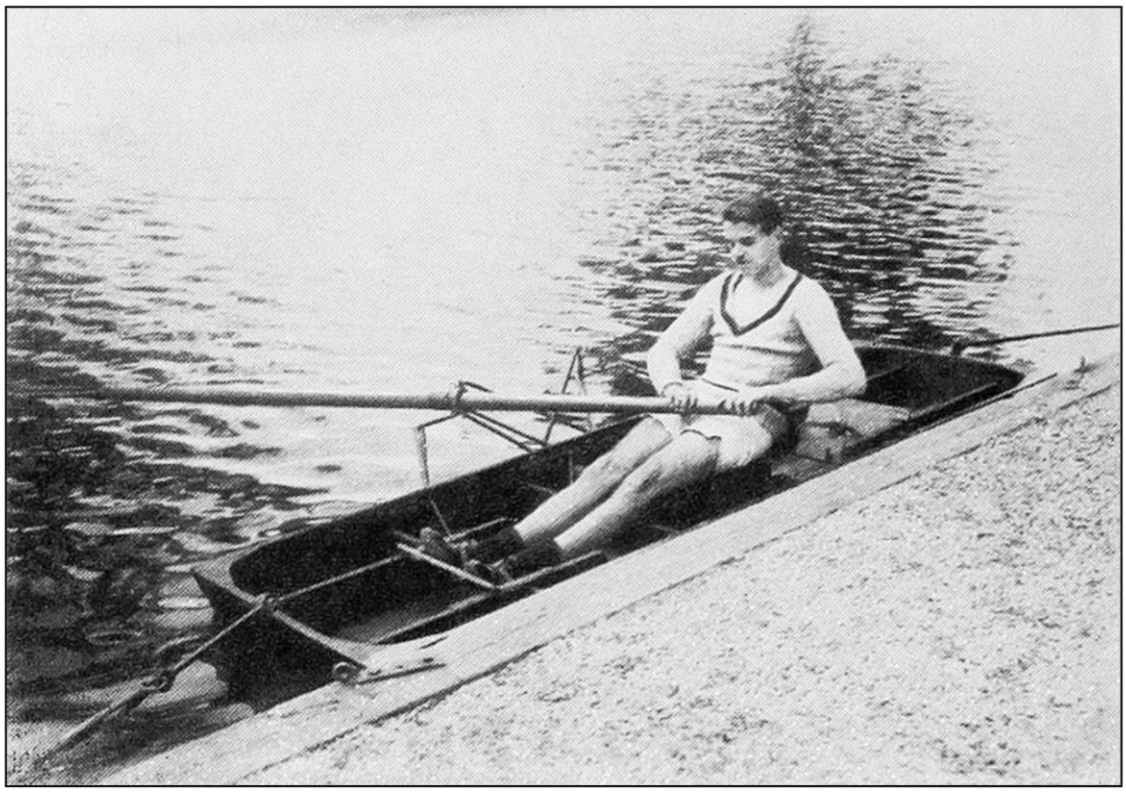
These movements made by the expert oarsman are much the same as the movements of cards made by a prestidigitator. He holds the King of Hearts in one hand and the Queen of Diamonds in the other, arid suddenly the King becomes the Queen and the Queen the King, with no apparent movement. The quickness of the hand deceives the eye. At Henley one will often see renowned old oarsmen making a peculiar flick of the hand. They are living in the past, and have an invisible oar in their hands. That little flick whips the oar round the turn, flicks the blade into the air, rolls the oar from the fingers, and strikes it forward by the ball of the hand. It is a conjuror's trick, and in the ordinary way takes years to learn. An oarsman is much better after ten years' rowing than after five, and it is because it takes those ten years to get proficient at these turns, because they have never been explained or taught.

PRACTISE THE TURNS IN A FIXED TUB

If the beginner studies these turns and takes an oar in a fixed tub or tank, and works at them for a week, he will lay a marvellous foundation for his rowing, and he will get the oily elastic stretched feeling which is a wonderful joy — a joy because one is using his body in perfect harmony and rhythm. He is synchronising the movements of his limbs correctly which gives a glorious feeling. The outside hand allows the oar to roll in its fingers. They just rest lightly on the oar ready to do their work when forward. A good exercise is to take the outside hand off the oar coming forward, swing it high round in the air and grip the oar as it is turning. As the oar is rowed in to the finish, the handle is swinging inwards and the outside arm gets at a wide angle to the oar, which is a weak position. The inside arm should be rowed home at right angles to the oar, allowing the elbow to work freely away from the body, which is a strong position, and so the inside hand controls the oar.

THE ELBOWS

Most oarsmen row the elbows too near to the body — a remnant of the old coaching. Both elbows should be rowed home freely away from the body because that is the strongest position so the oar can be whipped fastest and hardest round the turn. As the oar is whipped round the turn the body — with a last kick on the stretcher — should be whipped away from the oar with a sort of "tuck-the-belly-away" movement, "all whalebone and steel, and a willowy feel." This whaleboney movement of the lower part of the body is what keeps the oar spinning and runs one stroke into the next. It ensures that one does not row the oar in to hit the body, a common but fatal error, and it ensures



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The elbows in the right position.

one holding one's weight on the oar till the last. The old teaching to keep the elbows close past the side is a weak position.

WHIP IT ROUND THE TURN WITH THE HANDS

At the finish the hands should be pulling as hard as they can to whip the oar round the finish and to start the oar spinning forward. That last whip of the hands reverses the movement of the body and starts it swinging forward [In those days this was called a "ferryman's finish", using the last bit of the pullthrough to reverse the motion of the back and begin to send it forward towards the stretcher. Most coaches, including Steve earlier in his career, considered this a serious error. Here in 1934 in Chat VI is the first time Steve embraced the ferryman's finish. – P.M.] — that swing forward being used to propel the boat. The last pull at the oar at the finish gets this forward swing into the last stroke. At the same time the toes hook at the straps and draw the boat forward and draw the body on to the stretcher. This final whip of the oar and hook of the toes reverses the whole of the movements, leaves the body floating forward at rest, and puts it into a position so that it can gather on the stretcher and compress, ready to spring for the next stroke As the oar is drawn into the finish and whipped round the turn the oarsman must have a full Lateral Pressure against the rowlock.

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"All through the swing he hears the boat sing
As she glides on her flying track."

LATERAL PRESSURE GIVES SPRING AND EASE

This Lateral Pressure at both turns gives a lovely spring to the stroke. Rowing with this pressure at both turns and rowing without it is the difference between riding in a well-sprung Rolls Royce, and in a springless dray.

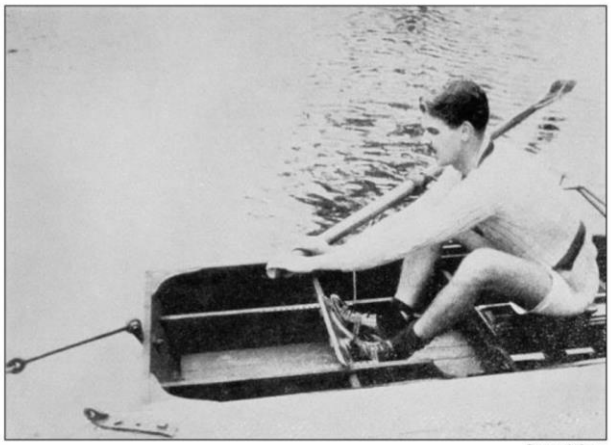
Getting this spring into the turns gives the power to row a fast stroke. It gives a delightful feeling of ease, oil, and elasticity. One should practise trying to press harder at the turns. Try and push the blade further outboard. Try and push the button off. In the old days one would see a crew throwing their bodies sideways at the catch. It was called scissoring, and looked ugly, but it always meant a fast crew.

LEAN ON THE OAR, AND LET IT LEAD

So try throwing yourself at the rowlock, and pushing the button off at both ends of the stroke. To practise this, exaggerate as much as you like; it will all make for better rowing. As one swings forward, the oar leading and the oarsman leaning on the oar, balancing it in the air with the inside hand, and feeling the blade in his hands, and feeling the oar drawing him out still controlling the oar with the inside hand, that control being always with the thumb and little finger, the oarsman should feel the blade leading.

Get the swing forward like that, and it will set the Time, the Balance, and the Control; also row with the fingers and that will set the Touch; the four fundamentals of all athletics are Balance, Timing, Control, and Touch.

FLOAT ON TO THE STRETCHER



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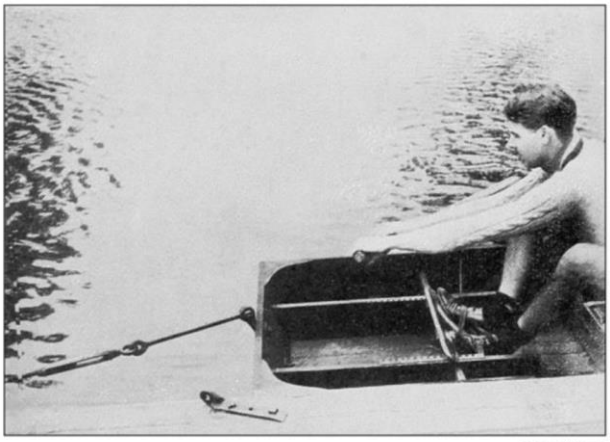
Note the ease forward and the balance. Mileage makes Champions. This oarsman is obviously just off for America.



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Back from America still gathered on the stretcher with increased driving power and perfect ease.

As the oarsman swings forward thus, he should come on to the stretcher just as if he was getting out of a chair. There must be an initial momentum to get out of the chair. That momentum when rowing is supplied by the “throw her away” whip of the oar that starts the body floating forward when backed up by the hook of the toes. As he floats forward thus, and transfers his weight on to the stretcher, the oar swinging inward as he squares the blade, the Lateral Pressure should be such that *he could balance himself on the stretcher and rowlock with a firm grip of the oar as if he were trying to climb it*. In fact, at the forward turn there should be an infinitesimal fraction of time when he is balanced on stretcher and rowlock trying to climb his oar. He compresses on the stretcher just as if he were getting out of a chair, and he gathers on the stretcher just as he would if he were preparing to jump over the chair backwards. As he swings forward the oar controlled by the inside hand, and driven forward by the ball of the hand, and the blade feathered and balanced high and firm, he should prepare to roll the blade into the fingers by a manipulation of the thumb and little finger — a sort of roll, or throw, to square the blade. A very good exercise to get this right is to let go with the outside hand and swing it forward like the sail of a windmill, and grip the oar in its fingers just as the inside hand is squaring the blade, and row it from there as he springs back, drawing at the oar with the fingers of both hands.

NO BLISTERS – WORK THE HANDLE OF THE OAR WITH THE FINGERS

If the movements of the oar, bringing it forward, and squaring it, and rowing it through the water, and feathering it, are done by correct hand manipulation, an oarsman will

never blister his hands. Blistered hands and wearing gloves only mean a clumsy man not fit to be in a boat. Study these turns, and there will not be any blisters. Oarsmen often have a mania for having the oar handle roughened. That, like the blisters, only means clumsiness. Study these turns and how to grip the oar, and there will not be any blisters or clumsiness. Blistered hands and wearing gloves only mean clumsy rowing. They mean rolling and generally spoiling the boat as a crew. So learn to manipulate the oar with the thumb and little finger of the inside hand. Learn to roll the oar from the fingers to the ball of the hand at the finish; learn to carry it forward pressed by the ball of the hand, and controlled with the thumb and little finger, which hold it pressing against the rowlock, ready with a flick to roll or throw the oar into the fingers with a still further forward movement when the body is right forward. This squaring of the blade is done in a flash when right forward. The blade being held on the feather till right forward holds the boat balanced. Starting to square the blade sooner varies the weight on the oar and destroys the stability of the boat. One can only hold the blade feathered till forward when he has learnt these turns. So start your rowing career by learning the Lateral Pressure and handling the oar properly. In the old days, we used to have a slide and a rigger and portion of an oar in our rooms, and practise these turns. I was in Trinity Hall at 6 a.m. every morning with Bristowe and McKenna, teaching these turns in 1886, and in 1886 and 1887, Trinity Hall won the bulk of the Henley Regatta.

Chat VII

The Endless Chain

Rowing is an endless chain movement, consisting of rounded movements. The handle of the oar moves in the segment of a circle. The button should be kept continuously pressing against the rowlock, and the oarsman should swing forward as if swinging on a door. This Lateral Pressure against the rowlock holds the body firm and taut as it swings forward — not floppy as it would be if not kept firm by this Lateral Pressure. The oarsman should realise that the handle of the oar moves forward and back in a segment of a circle and at the turns on to and off the feather at the Catch and Finish, the oar moves with circular movements, from the plane in which it is rowed through the stroke, to the plane in which it is swung forward and vice-versa.

CIRCULAR MOVEMENTS

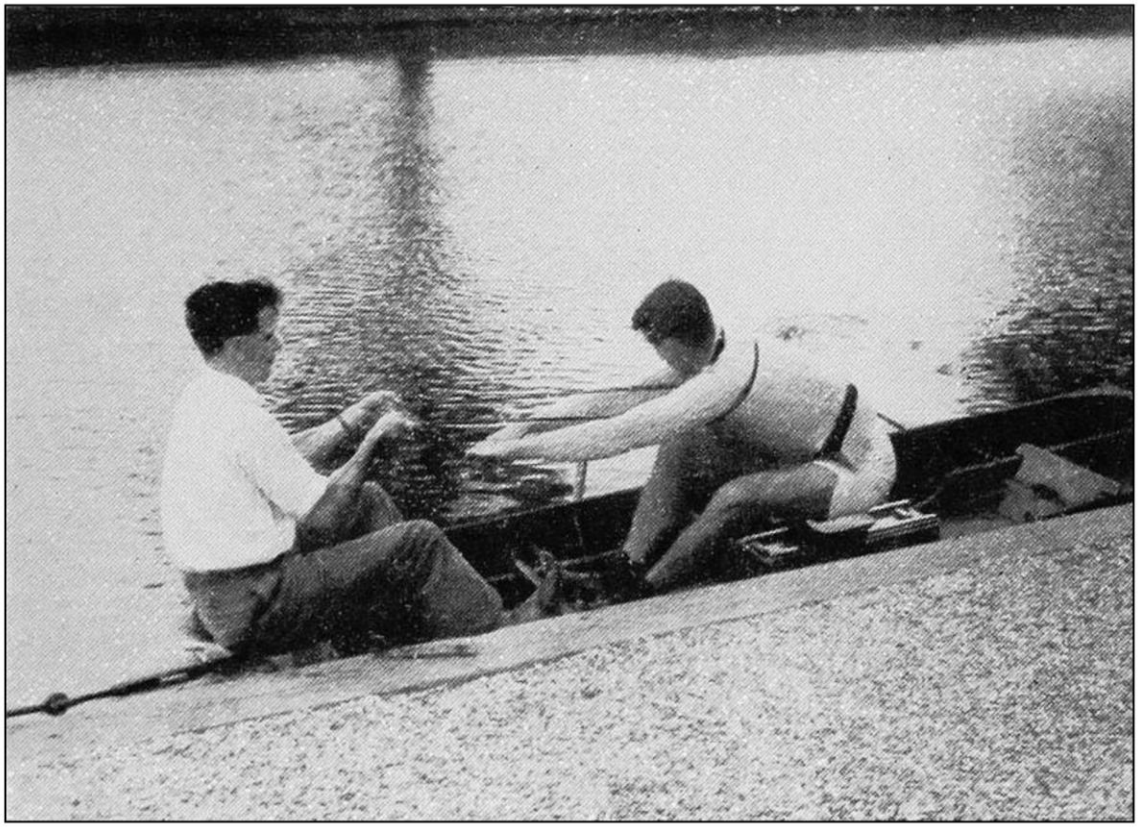
These turning circular movements should be learnt as soon as possible. The movement of the oar handle in a complete stroke is more like turning a wheel than pushing it forward and back in straight lines. The oar should be struck on to the balance with a rounded sweeping swing, with a lightning flick that carries it round the turn and gives it a momentum that starts it forward; and the oarsman should feel that the oar is leading and drawing him forward, and he should feel that he has flicked the blade freely and firmly into the air, and that he is leaning on the oar with a rounded downward pressing movement that balances the blade in the air — “Feather high” is the call — and holds the rigger firmly controlled. Although the blade is carried forward practically in one plane the feeling of the finished oarsman is that the movement is rounded; and similarly through the stroke, although the blade is rowed through in one plane, the feeling again is a rounded movement.

LET THE BLADE LEAD — AND FEEL WHAT IT IS DOING

To perfect the endless chain movement, “Let the blade lead all through the stroke” is the best thought. The oarsman is only there to work the oar to move the boat, or, to be more accurate, to generate the power to move the boat by springing his weight off the stretcher, and then applying this power by drawing it on to the oar, and drawing the oar against the rowing-pin and drawing the blade into the water to hit and drive away the water. That is all the oarsman can do — apply his weight to push the water away as fast and as far as he can. The pushed water resents this and says, “If you are going to push me away, I will push the boat away.” It is this reaction of the water on the blade that drives the boat. This is very important. The whole of the oarsman’s job is to sense what the blade is doing with the water, and what the water is doing with the blade, and to keep on feeling that he is pushing the water harder and that the blade is being pushed harder by the water. The blade working through the water is the index of the oarsman’s work, and of his value as an oarsman, and the sooner the oarsman learns that and

senses what the blade is doing with the water, and what the water is doing with the blade, the better.

HONEST WORK — NO GINGER BEER



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Teaching how to drive the weight off the stretcher, on to the rowing pin and off the slide.

It is quite possible (and frequently happens) that an oarsman — on hearing that the blade working the water is an index of the oarsman's value — will try and make the biggest commotion in the water that he can with the blade. This is a very different thing from driving the water away honestly. To make the biggest commotion with the water, the oarsman, after getting a good catch that lifts the water in front of his blade, can — by pulling the handle slightly down — start to row the blade into the air and only push the water away that has been lifted above the level; thus there is no solid bank of water to react on the blade, and so the blade makes a very big show of water moving, but it does not move the boat — this is commonly called making ginger beer. If the oarsman is honestly trying to propel the boat, this will not happen; but it seems to me to be getting more frequent. So, coach and oarsman, watch for the honestly working blade; it will always make the water come up — as the blade is rowed out — swirling as if boiling. This swirling water shows a true honest stroke and can only be got by a first-class oar.

WORK

So work honestly, to push the boat. Work to get the Lateral Pressure. Work to get the turns correctly. Work to turn mother's mangle. Work to drive the blade faster and farther through the water. Work to make the water come up as if boiling, at the finish. Remember an oarsman's whole duty (and pleasure) is to work the oar to propel the boat. "Work to take hold of the water as hard as you can; row it through harder and finish it out hardest," Jimmy Hastie, "Genesis of Rowing", Chap. I, VI. Then you will discover Jimmy Hastie's last chapter and last verse of his "Revelations": "There is a way to tap a four over the 'Varsity course in under twenty minutes." In those days 19 minutes 9 seconds was record for an eight. When the rowing is true it feels like a tap, though one is really rowing his longest, hardest, and fastest. It takes a long time to learn this. I fancy the general idea of rowing is: Move the oar straight forward; stop and square the blade; and then pull the oar straight back; stop and get the hands away; and then swing the body down. That is, rowing consists of straight lines and angles. It is really all rounded movements without any stops; a continuous endless chain spinning-wheel movement, always flowing.

"LOOSE AND EASY"

Again, the thought is apt to be that body and arms are held stiffly straight, whereas the arms should work like a piece of stretched elastic and the body should be held taut and controlledly firm, not like a piece of cast-iron, but rather like whalebone or steel. "Loose and easy" is a coaching expression meant to do away with tension and stiffness, but certainly not to be loose and sloppy. Taut, firm, and elastic is the real idea.

STRIKE ON TO THE FEATHER

The rounded movement is most important. The blade should be rowed out of the water and struck on to the feather with a downward sweeping swing of the oar handle, and should be rowed into the water with an upward swinging sweep — both with the same boldness. It is a strike on to the balance and a strike from the balance. Some coaches coach for coming on to the feather with a light hand, and the oarsman construes this into taking the oar out of the water gingerly and with as little pressure as possible. Fear of rolling the boat also makes him come on to the feather in this way. This is a slow heavy movement. It means that the oar hangs heavy on the rowlock. The right movement is a sharp strike. Strike the rowlock firm and hard. This will strike the blade quickly into the air and give it an upward momentum so that it will have no weight on the rowlock. "Feather high" is a very good expression for this. Striking fast and firm is an instantaneous movement, and it is surprising how one feels the rowlock acting as if it resented the movement and was pushing the oar into the air. That is really the momentum from the strike which drives the blade into the air and has taken the weight off the rowlock. A very good exercise I used to do in a tub with fixed rowlocks was to strike the oar so hard on to the sill of the rowlock that I could bring the blade perpendicularly up over my head. As the oar is throwing the boat away with a finishing pull, one whips it round the turn. This whip strikes the blade high into the air, thus

running one stroke into the next, and so keeping the oar handle moving in an endless chain movement.

DON'T TOUCH THE BODY

Many oarsmen row the oar in to touch the body. This is fatal; it means breaking the rhythm, checking the pull, and letting the weight sit on the seat, and then starting the swing forward. Striking on to the balance and whipping the oar round the turns with a firm "throw the boat away" and strike movement holds the weight on the oar, and so off the seat, and the last throw pulls the weight on to the stretcher. This finishing turn is far and away the most important part of the whole stroke. The difference between a "light hand" and a "firm strike" finish, is much the same as taking plaster off a cut. If it is taken slowly and gently and carefully it gives a lot of pain and does harm, whereas by a firm flick it is off and away. There is a very great similarity between this flick of the plaster off a cut and whipping the oar round the turn.

THE QUICK TURN AT THE BEGINNING

The oar is held on the feather with the blade balanced firm and high till right forward and then turned square by the manipulation of the thumb and little finger of the inside hand, rolling or throwing the oar into the fingers with a still further forward movement, a forward and upward movement that is done in a flash. At the same moment the blade is squared, that is, turned to just past a right angle with the water, and the oar is placed firmly against the rowing-pin and held there all through the stroke by the manipulation of the thumb and little finger of the inside hand. As the oar is being thus squared the fingers of the outside hand grip the oar. At the same moment the oarsman's weight is transferred from the seat to the stretcher with a forward and rising movement, and compressed on the stretcher. Then the oarsman springs off the stretcher, starting the slide into motion and rows the blade into the water.

PULL WITH THE ARMS AND HANDS

One very frequently hears the coach calling out for more leg-work. What the oarsman should realise is that the legs move the body and so supply the power to propel the boat, and the hands use that power to propel the boat by drawing at the oar. The oarsman should realise that to synchronise his movements he must pull as hard as he can at the oar as he springs off and pushes at the stretcher. The pull at the oar converts the power of the spring into work. The hands have got to start the pull at once — that is, directly the body starts to spring off the stretcher. The hands have to pull the oar in to the body from the start, and the endless chain movement of the oar means that it has to be continuously moving sufficiently faster than the body, so as to arrive in to the body just as it finishes its swing back. The old idea was: "hold the arms straight as long as possible and do not use them." That is a wrong idea. The legs drive the body right out stretched and then the hands pull at the oar as hard as possible, and so apply as much weight as possible to propel the boat. *By drawing at the oar with the hands, the muscles of the arms are not used*. It brings in the muscles down the back, and it is getting the full

use of these muscles by drawing at the oar that gets them fit, and so, as they improve, more and more weight can be applied longer and harder. Jimmy Hastie, captain of Thames for ten years in the seventies, used to say to me: “Take a hold of it as hard as you can, row it through harder, and finish it out hardest.” This is repetition, but I find, in coaching, oarsmen want plenty of repetition to drive points home.

Chat VIII

Fixed-tub work

ADVANTAGES OF THE FIXED TUB

The next thing is to work in a fixed tub. Starting in a fixed tub is best because it cannot roll, and the rowing-pin and boat do not move. The rolling boat and the moving pin make it harder for the beginner to make correct movements. I strongly recommend the beginner to go down and practise the movements described in the foregoing pages by himself. The more he learns to work by himself and to use his initiative, the better. Oarsmen are far too ready to go plodding on, using no initiative, but simply waiting for the coach to direct them. No coach can help as well as a man can help himself by trying out things. Take this book and go through its movements in a fixed tub. You could not beat that to improve your rowing. Another point of the value of working in a fixed tub is that the blade travels through about 11 feet of water instead of a very much shorter distance in a moving boat, and so the rowing muscles are conditioned faster.

DEVELOPING THE MUSCLES

An oarsman's capacity as a rowing machine varies according to his capacity to handle the oar correctly, plus the condition of his rowing muscles. The muscles down the back and the abdominal muscles are the ones that want conditioning most, as they are not so much used out of a boat. "Mileage makes Champions," as it conditions the muscles and improves the handling of the oar. If one wants to be a good oarsman he should keep conditioning the muscles, not only in a boat during the rowing season, but also by other exercises in the off seasons. In these days when, in civilised countries, men spend their lives in offices, a course of daily exercises will benefit their health and generally make them fitter. A course of daily exercises, started during the athletic period of a man's life, will become a habit and can be carried on with very great advantage daily through life, thus keeping away rheumatism, etc., and making a man healthier and happier through life.

GETTING INTO THE TUB

The beginner should start with all the work in a fixed tub he can get. He should spend hours daily working in the fixed tub, if possible. On stepping into the fixed tub, one should step on the middle with the ball of his foot with an elastic tread, let himself down elastically on to the seat, take hold of the oar with an elastic grip in the fingers, controlling it balanced on the sill of the rowlock, and pressing the button firmly against the rowlock, and holding the blade in the air. This control is mostly, if not entirely, done by the inside hand. The fingers take hold of the oar as they have the power and the touch. One may say, What does it matter how I get into a boat? It matters in this way, namely that the outstanding quality of the finished oarsman is his touch.

TOUCH

Touch is the finesse of rowing, and of all athletics, and one should make a habit of making every movement with the utmost possible touch — not only in getting into and in rowing a boat, but in every act throughout life. Developing touch is developing the athletic capacity. Everything one picks up, every step he takes, in fact everything he does, let him do it with the greatest grace, elasticity, springiness, delicacy, and lightness of movement that he can command, and he will go on improving his athletic capacity. Any movement of any part of the body done gracefully, and with touch is a pleasure, and done clumsily is the opposite. One will see some people sit down in a boat (and get out of it) with a heavy jarring movement that will tend to make for clumsiness, and the reaction will be a feeling that life is a dull and heavy business whereas, if any movement is executed with touch, the reaction will be that life is a pleasure. When playing cards, learn to deal and hold the cards and play them with touch, and go on improving the touch till at last you can make the Queen of Hearts become the King of Diamonds by movements so delicately executed that they are invisible. Similarly, make all your movements in a boat with the utmost touch, and your rowing will improve, and as it improves your movements will become smoother, more elastic and more powerful, and less noticeable, until at last, the movements of the perfect oar become invisible.

THE INSIDE HAND ALONE

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The best way to teach a man that he must control the oar with the inside hand.

Having sat down and taken hold of the oar, and balanced it in the air, the first thing to do is to let go with the outside hand and grip it with the fingers of the inside hand, and press the button against the rowlock. To do this, one must give a sideways pressure with the little finger and thumb of the inside hand. Take plenty of time over this; study it carefully and pull the oar away and press it up against the button a hundred times. One will have travelled a long way towards handling the oar correctly by doing this. As a rule it takes many years to get the controlled movements of the oar, and pulling it away and pressing it back *consciously* against the rowlock with the thumb and little finger will put one on the right track at once, and eventually the true control — which means watermanship — will come very much faster.

EXERCISES FOR BALANCE AND CONTROL

The next exercise is to wave the blade up and down and learn to feel it in your hands, so to speak, and learn to feel that it is balanced on the sill of the rowlock. Then swing it back and forward, balanced on the rowlock. This is all very elementary, but it lays a true foundation for one's rowing, and it wants lots of repeating, till the actions become stereotyped, which will take time.

THE FORWARD TURN

Now feel that the thumb and little finger are controlling the oar, and strike it forward with the ball of the inside hand (the other hand still off the oar) and carry it right forward feathered; when right forward — just the reach of the arm, no body swing or slide movement — turn it square with the thumb and little finger. The blade should be turned to just past a right angle with the water. The button should be pressed firmly against the rowlock all through this forward move; the bottom of the loom must make and hold contact with the rowing-pin and the oar must be held consciously balanced on the rowlock. Too much attention cannot be paid to these points at first. The thumb and little finger roll the blade square with a forward movement, also with an upward movement, taking the weight off the sill of the rowlock and rolling or throwing the handle of the oar forward into the fingers.

THE BEGINNING

Then grip with the hands and row the blade backward and downward into the water so as merely to make the turning movement; do not try to apply any weight or move the body. At the same time concentrate on the lower part of the loom of the oar (that part against the button), and be sure this makes contact with the rowing-pin. Feel that the button is being pressed firmly against the rowlock; and that the loom, *especially the lower part*, is pressing firmly against the rowing-pin. Making sure that this lower part of the loom makes and keeps contact with the rowing-pin is one of the most important points in rowing. Oarsmen are apt to think that they have completed this turn before they have, and they start the stroke, with the result that the blade slices in and runs down, and there is no spring or firmness in the stroke, and the blade running down deep makes the stroke very heavy, and the oarsman has to pull heavily on the rowlock to get the blade out.

KEEP CONTACT WITH THE ROWING-PIN

Not making contact between the bottom of the loom and the rowing-pin, ruins the stroke and rolls the boat, and tires the oarsman. Work to flick the blade round to past a right angle with the water and make sure that the oar makes complete contact with the rowing-pin. The little finger and thumb of the inside hand flick the oar square, and they hold it firm against the rowing-pin all through the stroke; so when rowing the complete stroke, work for this point till you get it right. Making contact is the art of timing; keeping contact is the art of control.

THE TURN AT THE FINISH

Now, with a rotary motion of the inside hand and with the outside hand off the oar, start the blade on to the feather with a downward and backward movement. With the thumb and little finger roll the oar from the fingers to the ball of the hand, striking the oar handle still down but forward and striking the blade freely into the air and forward (note that the forward movement of the hands is towards the stern, and of the blade towards the bows). As one whips the oar round this finishing turn, and the oar is rowed in towards the stomach, whip the stomach back out of the way. Getting this turn right is the hardest of the lot and takes the longest. The oar should be whipped at the stomach and the stomach whipped back, the lower part of the body acting like a piece of whalebone. When properly done, one will feel the abdominal muscles brought into play in such a way as to execute this throw-her-away whip correctly. When practising these two turns at first with the blade in the air all the time, they can be very short, so that the whole movement would make a circle of about six inches diameter. But, of course, the turn square is practised with the arms at the full reach, and the turn on to the feather with the oar near the body.

WATCH THE BLADE

The oarsman cannot repeat practising these two turns often enough. Let him watch the little finger and thumb manipulating the turns, and watch the Lateral Pressure, especially seeing to it that the lower part of the loom makes contact firmly. That contact has to be made and held throughout the stroke; so make it with the necessary firmness. Then watch the oar balanced on the rowlock. Keep looking at the blade, button, etc., frequently. If one would give a lot of time and thought to these exercises, it would make every difference to his rowing capacity, and to his enjoyment of rowing. There is no more pleasant sensation in life than a really well-rowed stroke, and it will only come eventually by making sure of handling the oar truly. Work on both sides so that each hand becomes proficient in these turns. Getting them right with both hands makes a man ready to scull.

ROW THE BLADE IN

The next exercise is to come forward and row the blade into the water — not a long stroke, just about six inches. This is done with both hands. The oarsman should keep coming forward, transferring his weight on to the stretcher from the slide, just as if he were getting out of a chair; and he should spring his weight off the stretcher just as he is rowing the blade into the water. He must feel that his arms are elastically alive — no locked elbows — and he must realise that he must pull at the oar to pull the moving weight sprung off the stretcher on to the oar. The hands have got to pull at the oar just as hard as the feet drive into the stretcher. So many people think the leg-drive is everything, whereas the hand-pull has to be equal to it, and the hands must start pulling the oar in to the body at once. Practise this, one stroke feeling the spring off the stretcher, and the next the pull at the oar, and keep on watching the Lateral Pressure and the lower part of the loom being held firmly against the rowing-pin. Only row the blade a few inches through the water, and then strike on to the balance. Rowing a very

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Note the perfect ease, the weight is on the stretcher and on the rowing pin.
This is a very good exercise.

short portion of the stroke will not tire so much, and so the beginner can do a great many. Another good point of only rowing the catch, and finishing with the hands well away from the body, is that one can strike on to the balance without having any fear of the knees getting in the way, as he would have, if he began by rowing the full stroke. So he learns a true strike on to the balance, and gets an endless-chain continuity easily.

PRACTISE ON BOTH SIDES

Practise this catch stroke on both sides. Rowing on one side only develops the muscles on one side, and is apt to make a man clumsy. Also, by practising on one side only, he will not be able to scull, and he will not be able to row on the other side, and so very often loses a chance of promotion to a higher boat.

WHIP THE BLADE ROUND THE TURN

Having worked away for a good time at the catch, then go for the finish, rowing only the last six inches of the stroke. Practise the “whip round the turn” and “throw her away,” and striking the oar on to the balance. *Be sure the oar or hands never touch the body*. As the oar is pulled in, whip the belly and the small of the back away — feeling the body acting like whalebone, and the abdominal muscles working — so as to be able to whip the oar round the turn. This is a very important point also when rowing a full stroke; just at the finish, with a last kick, kick the belly out of the light, to whip the oar round the turn. There is a final kick and a tucking away of the belly with a truly rowed stroke, but the last pull also starts the body floating forward. When the belly is whipped back correctly and the last “throw her away” is done also correctly, the body comes forward just as if a spring brought it forward, and the momentum that floats the body forward has been

generated by that last whip of the oar; and so the forward swing propels the boat in the last stroke, because the last whip allows the body to come forward at rest, ready to gather on and spring off the stretcher. It is the whip at the oar and hook at the toe straps that bring the body forward. [ferryman's finish]

USE THE ARMS

Do not be afraid to use your arms to the utmost. Pulling at the oar does not use the arm muscles, it only brings in the muscles down the back, and conditions them, and so improves one as a rowing machine.

TRUTH BEFORE LENGTH

After practising the finish on both sides, then go in for full strokes rowing the blade right through. When rowing the full strokes, "never bite off more than you can chew;" that is the first rule. Length of stroke is the main thing in rowing, and a very great number of oarsmen are ruined by trying to row too long. By rowing too long the weight comes off, the rhythm is broken, and the stroke is heavy and dead. If the stroke feels heavy, it is too long; so shorten up and get true and then the blade will travel through and feel no weight. So in the fixed tub, make the full stroke very short at first, and as the muscles get fit, true length will come. Length will follow truth; trying to row too long is the most fatal error, and unfortunately the most frequently practised error.

MILEAGE IN THE FIXED TUBS

After some strokes on both sides, go back to the other points: the turns, Lateral Pressure, etc., with the blade in the air. This is to get a rest; then go on with the catch, the finish, and the short full stroke, and keep on varying for as long a time as you can spend. Mileage in the fixed tub, or "Hourage", makes Champions. Rapidity of action is everything; so every now and then row half a dozen catches, finishes, and full strokes as fast as possible. In the fixed tub — and always — look at your blade, and learn what it is doing; and then sense the feel of it. When one gets in touch with the blade so that he can sense the feel, his foundation is solid. When rowing the catch only, and the finish, the oarsman should every now and again devote his attention to the Lateral Pressure; trying to press the button through the rowlock, and let him watch what a spring this gives. When rowing the turns let him study and get the rounded movements, striking on to the feather with a downward sweeping swing, and leaning on the oar and feeling it drawing him out forward, and feeling it truly balanced on the forward swing, and then striking from the balance with an upward swinging sweep. This turn, "mother's mangle", rounded movement, is very important and combined with handling the oar correctly is really the whole of rowing.

STUDY AND PRACTISE HARD

The movements may seem too elementary to bother about, but one cannot spend enough time in learning them. As I have said, a man rows better after twenty years than

after ten. That is because it takes this time to become complete master of these turns in the ordinary way. But by studying and practising them one will become a finished waterman in infinitely less time. They have never been explained or practised consciously by anyone, as far as I know. So study the rounded turns, the segment of a circle movement of the oar, the Lateral Pressure, and last and greatest, the manipulation of the oar with the thumb and little finger of the inside hand. Learning these points is a Royal Road to Watermanship. As they come, one should get more graceful, more elastic, more whaleboney, in fact, more Touch. All that is then necessary is conditioning the rowing muscles. Mileage makes Champions by conditioning these muscles.

NO GENTLEMAN'S OUTINGS

While practising on the bank or fixed tub, and during every row in a racing boat, every man ought to see he gets plenty of hard strokes every day. Many men go for the daily outing, and take what I call a gentleman's outing. This does little if any good. At every easy, and throughout the row, one should feel that he is breathing freely, and that he is really taking exercise. The Japanese say that breathing exercises are all that is necessary, and they are right; so see that by honest hard work you get plenty of breathing exercises.

EXERCISES

To make a success of rowing, and to acquire a most useful habit for life, one should go in for daily exercises in the off season, when not rowing.

HEAVY-WEIGHTS

Blacksmiths make the best athletes, because swinging heavy hammers daily conditions all the weight-lifting muscles, and gives that athletic sense called Rhythm. Beach [William "Bill" Beach, 1850-1935, Australian, World Professional Singles Champion 1884-87, the man who unseated Ned Hanlan. – P.M.], a blacksmith, won the Professional Scullers' Championship seven times. Fitzsimmons and a German blacksmith [Max Schmeling] both have won the Heavy-weight Boxing Championship. Jones, another blacksmith, was the world's fastest bowler.

SKIPPING

The most convenient and probably the best exercise is skipping [rope]. One can do all that is necessary in fifteen minutes, morning and evening daily, to keep himself thoroughly fit and continuously improving his athletic capacity. Let him start with a hundred fast skips to get breathing, then a hundred steady ones, then twenty double skips, then a hundred steady skips, then ten double on right leg only, ten easy, ten on left leg, a hundred singles on each leg, with ten easy between. Anyone doing a month of this would be surprised at the wonderful improvement in his body all round. His health would be wonderfully sound by a daily fifteen minutes first thing in the morning, and last

thing at night, and if the habit was kept going, health would be much better, and life much pleasanter, and more profitable; and especially would the benefit be reached between the years of sixty and eighty. It would prolong the average man's life five years with 100 per cent. more enjoyment and happiness.

WALKING

A good sharp daily walk at five miles an hour for one hour daily would be wonderfully beneficial. Fast swinging walking exercises the muscles of back and arms and chest as well as the legs. I had an example of this. I walked from London to Inverness; at Edinburgh I had a Turkish bath. The masseur remarked on the fine condition of the muscles of the back and chest and arms, and asked me what I had been doing to get them so fit. I said, "Nothing; I have just walked from London." To my surprise, he said that was the reason. When walking fast one swings the arms freely, and in a twenty-mile walk, one would swing the arms about 40,000 times. Skipping synchronises the movements of all the limbs from fingers to toes. The capacity for athletics is governed by the capacity for the synchronisation of the movements of the limbs. Good sharp walking acts similarly, so a walking tour is a fine thing, and one should make a point of beating five miles in the last hour.

I have only given the fundamental movements in this chat. I will go on to rowing without straps in the next chat.

Chat IX

Endless Chain

ONE STROKE RUNS INTO THE NEXT

Action and reaction are equal and opposite, and when the action of the stroke rowed through the water is correctly done, the reaction will allow the body to float forward at perfect rest; as the last whip of the oar throws the boat away and starts the body floating forward [ferryman's finish], the oar will spin round the turn, running one stroke into the next with never a check. As the oarsman gathers and springs off the stretcher, he should draw his weight elastically on to the oar and, stretched like a piece of elastic, should row the blade into the water, conscious that he has to draw his oar right through the stroke with an even elastic draw as hard as he can, and that he has to keep the oar spinning always at an even pace (full gallop) round the turn and right forward ready for him to gather on and spring off the stretcher — once more conscious that he has to keep the oar spinning right round, and that he has to be ready to gather and strike again. When the oarsman executes the stroke truly he will apply his full power with maximum effect, and he will float forward with minimum effort. So the harder and truer the action is through the stroke, the easier and truer the float forward will be. To get the endless chain movement, let one notice how when walking, just before the foot leaves the ground it gives a last push with the ball of the foot, and with the toes. In just the same way the oarsman should give a last pull with the hands as he flicks the oar on to the feather. Just as the foot after the last flick floats forward in the air, so the body floats forward after the finishing "throw her away" pull.

PRACTISE WITHOUT FOOT-STRAPS

I would recommend the beginner and all oarsmen to do plenty of work in the fixed tub and later in the moving tub, both without straps. If an oarsman accustomed to using straps rows a hard stroke without straps, he will be very apt to find his feet flying up in the air at the finish, and himself falling over backwards. That means that he relies on the straps to control his balance at the finish. One has only got to look at any one of over 95 per cent. of oarsmen rowing in a fixed tub, and it will be seen that the toe part of one foot is clinging to the straps, and off the stretcher, throughout the stroke. This is to control the body and bring it forward at the finish. Oarsmen who do this have not got the finish correct. The body movement is an endless chain rounded movement; one stroke runs into the next without any check when properly done. But it takes a lot of practise to get that. Rowing without straps is the way to get it. Let one row without straps and watch what happens. On the first stroke, as I have said, many an oarsman would feel an inclination to tumble backwards at the finish, but after a few strokes he will notice that the body puts in a regulating movement to check this tendency, and instead of leaning away from the oar and stretcher, it will lean on the oar and eventually lean towards the stretcher. If one notices this change going on, especially the first few strokes the first time he rows in a fixed tub without straps, he will see the Subjective

Mind's unconscious action working to hold the body balanced by an increasing pull at the oar, and so running one stroke into the next. He will notice, if he watches, as he keeps on rowing without straps, that the hands sustain their pull on the oar longer and harder, and so hold the weight of the body on to the oar longer, eventually getting in the culminating "throw her away" whip round the turn at the finish with the true endless chain movement, in which the weight of the body is held on to the oar till the finish, and the finish with its last draw transfers the weight of the body, so that it is floating forward on to the stretcher [ferryman's finish]; and one stroke flows into the next with a truer and truer endless chain movement.

THE STROKE IS NOT A SET OF SEPARATE MOVEMENTS

Probably every oarsman, when starting, thinks the stroke is a lot of separate movements; first a direct backward movement, a stop with the weight sitting on the seat, while the oar is taken out of the water, then the hands away, and then swing forward. No doubt this was the thought in the old text-books, with their "drop the hands down, bring the oar out and then feather," having by the way rowed the oar in to touch the chest. All hopelessly wrong; a collection of stops, and angular movements, instead of an endless chain, rounded, spinning movement, running one stroke into the next with no check.

MINIMUM OF WEIGHT ON THE SEAT

As I have said, the oarsman rowing without straps in a fixed tub will learn to hold the weight on to the oar right to the end of the stroke, and then with the final draw, will pull the weight on to the stretcher. As the oarsman learns this endless chain movement, he will sit less and less on the seat, and when perfect, he will transfer his weight from oar to stretcher without any weight ever resting on the seat. But the perfect oar who would not need a seat has not been seen yet.

Rowing without straps is a splendid tub exercise. In the chat on fixed tubs, I gave only the elementary exercises that are the foundation of working the oar, but this rowing without straps is an invaluable exercise. As the stroke is coming to the finish, swing the feet up into the air, touching nothing and straightening the knees, and then as one gives the final whip and starts the swing forward, swing the feet down and against the stretcher again. Go on with this till one gets a lovely rhythmical movement. The swing up and down of the feet will be then done just in the same way as the finished oarsman draws elastically at the straps with the toes, to help to draw the body forward or, as the "pros" used to say: "We hook the boat past us with our toes." As I have said one will notice that most oarsmen, when rowing with the feet in the straps in a fixed tub, will have the toes of one foot pulling at the straps all through the stroke. This is to help to balance the body, an unconscious act of that body controller, the Subjective Mind, done to be ready to hook the body forward. So work away at the strapless stroke with the rhythmical swing up and down of the feet. This is the foundation of the endless chain. Once more, as the oar is whipped round the turn, whip the lower part of the body out of

the way by whipping the belly in. It is an instantaneous movement, and when done properly makes the body act like a spring, as instantly after this drawing in, the belly whip, the toe hook, and the last pull, act as a spring and the body floats forward at rest.

PRACTISE THESE EXERCISES IN THE FIXED TUB

I have never coached for this because I have never coached for the body but allowed the Subjective Mind to work the body unconsciously. But for some time now I have been examining what are the movements made unconsciously, and this endless chain movement and the Lateral Pressure and the movements made in turning the oar that I have described, are the outcome of that examination. All these movements can be practised separately and consciously in a fixed tub. But they are many and intricate, and I doubt if practising separately when rowing would be wise.

IN THE BOAT, WORK THE OAR

I still advise men, when rowing and racing, to stick to concentrating on working the oar to move the boat. Think of gripping the water behind the rigger; think of driving the water away as fast and as far as you can; think of making the water come up boiling with a final whip; and then float out to grip the water once more, and above all, think of never biting off more than you can chew. In the endless chain movement the hands move further than the body swings, just the distance that the hands and oar move away from and towards the body. So the oar has to be spinning continuously just enough faster than the body moves, to spin this extra distance. So the oarsman must pull the oar in to him and flick it away just this much faster to keep it spinning at one speed. That speed should mean: Drive the body back as fast as you can, and pull the oar into it as quickly as you can. That will smooth into correct speed as time goes on (and you do it faster). The story is “stand not upon the order of your going, but go.” That is the way to get the speed correct. Or what I think the Americans’ call means: “At her, boys.”

DON’T EXAGGERATE “HANDS AWAY”

Many oarsmen shoot the hands away fast and lock the elbows straight. With a perfect “throw her away” that jerk could not come. The hands should keep moving from the body evenly, and the arms should only be stretched out straight when full forward and the elbow joints never stiffened or locked. Another good exercise is to come off the seat on to the stretcher and row back without touching the seat. It teaches the correct way to come on to the stretcher.

And now for the moving tub with a coach.

Chat X

Moving tub

SHOW HOW TO AVOID ROLLING THE BOAT

Now take the oarsman in a moving tub. This will need two oarsmen. See that they step into the middle and sit down balanced on their seats, and take hold of their oars correctly, holding them firmly in the fingers. Then explain that they have got to keep a controlling hold on their rowlocks with the oars. It would be a very good thing to get them to step in off centre, and show how that upsets the balance; to make them move the oar handle up and down, and show how that rolls the boat; and to make them put the oars in with the lower part of the loom not against the rowing-pin, and show them how the oar, when rowed in — not properly squared — runs down deep and presses on the sill and pulls the rigger down. Also make them sit off the balance and show how that rolls the boat, and make them swing crooked, swinging into and across the boat, and show how that rolls the boat. My experience has shown me over and over again that oarsmen have no idea that these things roll a boat, or that they do them, when they are doing them all the time. Slicing the oar in and pulling the rigger down is perhaps what is most frequently done. Every time either oarsman rolls the boat, the coach should explain to them why the boat rolled. He cannot give too much attention to this at first. He could then make them swing fore and aft, paying attention to the swinging evenly on the medial line. Then he could make them swing down, holding the oar balanced high and firmly on the sill of the rowlock. Then make sure that they square the blade truly and spring straight back.

SHOW IMPORTANCE OF HOLDING RIGGER FIRM

The next thing to do now is to change places with stroke, and show him how to sit firm and hold the rudder strings firm, pressing his feet firmly against the back of stroke's stretcher, and show him how to hold his body braced, and how to hold the rudder strings firm when putting on the rudder, and see that he is sitting, balancing the boat level. Then explain to the bowman how to hold his oar firmly controlled so that stroke has a solidly held rigger. This is very important, and the coach should explain how they must always sit balanced and hold the rigger firm with the oar. He can illustrate by taking his hands off his oar and asking bow to row a few strokes. Bow will find his rigger very unstable. Then the coach can hold his oar and hold the rigger firm, and bow will feel the benefit. If he can get the idea into the two men that they have always got to have a controlling hold of their bodies and of the rigger, he will have done his best work.

COACH ROWS

He should now row a few strokes, getting both men to watch his blade working, and he should criticise the blade-work, pointing out when he has done a good "catch" or a good "draw" or a good "throw away". He should point out that the catch when truly done has a

true sound when it takes the water correctly. But the oarsman must always remember that he must row the stroke right through. I have known crews to think that, if they get a good bell note, that is all that is needed. The coach should point out to the steerer how the rail behind his seat strikes him when the catch is true, and he should strike the steerer with a good catch, and get bow to work for it, and also the steerer when he changes places back again. Trying to make the boat strike the steerer, I have found, teaches the catch better than anything else does.

SHOW BLADE CUTTING THROUGH – AND WATER SWIRLING UP BEHIND

Next the coach should illustrate his blade cutting evenly through the water, and he should explain that every oarsman should try to make his blade cut further and faster through the water each stroke, but he must be careful to sense the feeling that he is moving the boat, and then he will row a true blade. He should explain that the blade moving through the water indexes his work, and all good judges will judge his value as an oar by his blade-work. Then he should point out how the water comes up swirling as if boiling behind the oar as it is rowed out at the finish. That is the greatest index of all. It is the water rushing in behind the oar to fill up the vacuum; and the truer the blade is rowed through, that is to say, the more evenly and continuously the weight is applied, the more powerful will this swirl be.

PRACTISE WITH EYES SHUT

By looking at the blade an oarsman learns to work it, but he should learn to feel what he is doing, and work for the feel without looking at it, except for looking occasionally to see what is really happening. He should shut his eyes and feel what the blade is doing. Shutting the eyes opens them more than anything to his rowing. The coach should explain that the blade drives the water away, but it is the reaction of the water resisting that propels the boat. He should get the men to sense the feeling of this action of the blade on the water, and the water's reaction. Once the oarsman senses this feeling he can keep working for it and thereby improve his rowing more than any coach can improve it. An oarsman can produce a very good blade at once by looking at it. He at once gets the knack of applying his weight, and in ten minutes he is using his body to move the boat better than he would be in many days by being coached to position his body.

PADDLE ON, ONE AT A TIME

Bow has been sitting holding the boat properly controlled whilst the coach has been illustrating. He should now get bow to watch his blade and paddle on, the coach holding his rigger firm. This paddling on, one at a time, is far the best coaching that can be given, while all three watch every stroke to see how the blade works. The coach should criticise bow's work, and keep illustrating with his own blade every now and then. After a little while bow should steer and coach go bow, and the steerer go stroke. The new cox should be taught how to sit and hold the rudder lines. All this is very important, as it gets

them to sit taut, balanced, and controlled, which is very necessary for learning how to take up and maintain the position the true waterman always takes. Then the coach should get the stroke oar to paddle on by himself, and he should criticise, always telling him when a stroke improves. I find that by this concentrating on working the blade, very little coaching is needed. When paddling on with only one oar rowing, it is best to row a few strokes with both oars to get way on, and then by holding the rudder against the single rower, one can hold the boat straight.

PRACTISE ON BOTH SIDES

Now the coach should steer and stroke go bow, so that both men can learn to row on both sides. It is really pitiable to see the number of men who can row only on one side. *It really means that they cannot row on any side or they would have very little trouble in rowing on both sides*. Rowing only on one side is apt to make men clumsy; they do not develop their muscles evenly. Rowing on both sides gives everyone a chance of getting into a higher boat on the opposite side to the one he is rowing on. It also gets a man ready to scull as he gets handy at turning the oar with both hands.

CONCENTRATION

When I get back into the steering seat I talk to the man who is rowing on, asking him what games he has played, and how he has done at them. This is to find out his general athletic capacity. Suddenly I ask him which is the best stroke of those just rowed, and he invariably knows. That shows that we have got him to feel what his blade is doing, and he knows. So I point that out to him, and explain that if he will keep concentrating like that, he will keep on improving his rowing far faster than any coach can improve him. Oh! if one could only get them to keep that concentration, how rowing would come on!

WELDING TOGETHER

After the coach has given both of the men several individual turns at the oar, let them paddle on together. After two or three short pieces, I find that they start the boat absolutely together. (I mean two absolute beginners.) That means that by concentrating on working the oar they are not only getting the sense of what their oar is doing, but also of what the other man is doing; *they are welding together*. So I point out that they are not only learning how to work their oar but that they are getting together, and if they would only go on like that, they would improve individually and collectively far faster than any coach could improve them. Learning to work the blades, brings in the capacity for welding, whereas coaching for body-form is apt to kill it.

LET THE BEGINNER WORK FOR HIMSELF

Coaches would be well advised to make the foregoing the beginning and the end of their coaching, and leave the beginner, who has learnt to concentrate on the blade, to work out his own salvation. By the foregoing he has been shown what to do, and he has

learnt to be able to feel his oar doing it, and by concentrating on that, he will improve faster than any coach can improve him. He will use his initiative instead of sitting patiently, waiting to carry out instructions from the coach. So let the oarsman keep feeling the blade travelling through the water and trying to make it go a little further and a little faster each stroke, and in that way he will get longer and longer.

IMPROVEMENT AND INCREASED ENJOYMENT ALWAYS POSSIBLE

The one thing he should always remember is, that by rowing the blade his hardest and best every stroke, he will keep improving his own rowing, and by honest hard work he will be getting fit to race. As one goes on improving one continually finds new heights to climb in the rowing and coaching mountains; there is no end to it. I know I learnt more last year — my fifty-first year of coaching — than in any previous year, and the more one learns, the more enjoyable it all becomes. That is the most important thing to understand; many men do not realise they can keep on improving. So learn to concentrate on working the blade and remember the only way to learn to row is good, honest, hard blade-work every stroke. Then the body will work right, and the rowing will keep on improving. The art of watermanship is controlling the rigger with the oar, so that it keeps level in one plane. When the riggers go down on one side of the boat, it upsets the rowing on that side, and so spoils the boat. The first principle in watermanship is to control the oar so that the rigger does not rise and *let the riggers on the other side drop*. It is easy to hold the rigger from rising, but very hard to stop one's rigger from dropping. So remember the art of watermanship is *don't let your rigger rise*.

My crews have been very successful, and it is mainly owing to confining my tubbing to working the oars as set out in this Chat.

Chat XI

Rowing in the eight

"STRIKE! LOWER!" EXERCISE

There are two exercises I like to give to an eight. The "Strike! Lower!" and the "Waggle". The "Strike! Lower!" is: At the word "Strike", the crew strike the handles of the oars down and so flick the blades on to the balance in the air. This should be done in the same way as the blade is rowed out and struck on to the balance in the air at the finish of the stroke. This strike puts the crew into a workmanlike position, the bodies held taut and the hands gripping the oars firmly and flicking the oars on to the balance on the sills by the rowlocks with a lightning flick. Oarsmen are apt to sit loose and floppy and with the oars held anyhow; so this strike brings the crew to the correct position to flick the oars on to the Balance and to be ready to start the body — that is to say, into the workmanlike position that the old waterman and oarsman never abandons, from the moment he steps into the boat until he steps out of the boat. The Strike on to the Balance as the blade is rowed into the air is the point where the boat is most likely to roll, and this strike-exercise, if done often enough, would get the crew into making this finishing turn without a tremor in the boat. This would be the greatest help to the crew. It is the unstable boat that kills rowing. Again, at the word "Lower" the crew should lower the oars back on to the water firmly and smartly, just as one rows the blade into the water at the catch, while the oarsman holds the body taut and lowers the oar with a springing movement, smartly and with control. Performing this exercise correctly will help the balance at the turns very much, and put the oarsman into that taut, firm, and controlled position that it takes the best oarsman years to learn.

THE "WAGGLE" EXERCISE

The "Waggle" Exercise is: At the word "one", strokeside raise and bowside lower their hands. At "two", bowside raise and strokeside lower their hands. At "three", the crew come to the correct position at the "easy". Repeat "one", "two" several times and then "three". It will give the crew an insight into how easy it is to roll the boat by varying the weight of their hands on the oar. Also, and even more important*, it will be noticed that the crew have assumed unconsciously the firm braced and controlling position of the watermanlike oarsman*. It will be found that if the cox is asked to try and roll the boat by throwing his body about, he cannot make much impression because the crew are holding their oars firmly controlled. A Jesus cox once said to me: "How is it that the 'Varsity coach says I am rolling the boat, and when you ask me to roll the Jesus boat, I cannot?" I said, "One of the puzzles of orthodoxy or awfuldoxy, old chap."

After the "Waggle" row the boat on twenty strokes or so, and then easy it. Now ask the cox to roll the boat, and it will be found that he can easily. That means that the controlling hold has gone. Give the "Waggle" again and then ask the cox to roll the boat, and it will be found to be as solid as a rock. Point out to the crew with what control they

are sitting and holding the boat, and get them to realise the advantage and necessity of acquiring this position always. At every easy it would be a good thing to get the cox to try and roll the boat and, if any slackness was found, to give the “Waggle” and then let the cox try and roll it. That is the best way to instil the waterman’s controlling hold into a crew. On congested rivers like the Cam, the crews can’t stop and play at these exercises but on the Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays — the easy days — it would be advisable to do several Strike and Waggle exercises.

INDIVIDUALS ROWING SEPARATELY

After the Waggle and Strike exercises, the best thing the coach can do is to get bow and two to paddle on about ten strokes, and impress upon the others that they must sit balanced, holding the riggers firmly controlled. Next get three and four, and then five and six, and then seven and stroke, to paddle on ten strokes, each time impressing upon the others how important it is to learn to hold the boat controlled. Next get the bow four, and then the stern four to row ten strokes, and then the bow six, and then the stern six, and then the whole eight. Then the Waggle again. Then get each man in turn to row half a dozen strokes by himself. That is an exercise one could repeat with advantage on many days many times. Next let them paddle twenty strokes and sit with the blades balanced in the air; and then row on from there four strokes and balance again; repeat several times.

PADDLE LIGHT

Next give the crew the Paddle Light. That means to row each stroke absolutely true but with as little work as possible*. This is the hardest exercise to do correctly, and the most beneficial*. Each man should try to come forward with perfect ease at absolute rest. Also he should try to hold the oar balanced evenly on the rowlock and held on the feather till right forward, and then square the blade and row it into the water with the movement described several times previously. Let him feel that he springs off the stretcher very lightly but with a true spring with the whole weight; and let him feel that he is drawing with elastic arms at the oar, so as to draw the oar gently but continuously against the rowing-pin, and to draw the blade similarly through the water, right to the finish; and then, with a slightly harder pull at the finish, let him whip the oar round the turn. It should all be done with the utmost care. The oarsman should come forward at rest and rock himself on to the stretcher as if he was rocking a baby to sleep, and all through the stroke he should move as if he was nursing a baby to sleep. Thus he will improve his touch rapidly, and that is everything. Perfect the “Paddle Light”, and you perfect your rowing, but it will take a lot of hard trying.

GRADING

The next exercise is: Start with six strokes Paddle Light; then with six strokes grade up to Paddle Firm; then six strokes Paddling Firm; then grade up six strokes to Row; then Row six strokes; and grade down to Paddle Firm and to Paddle Light, coming to a stop with the oars balanced in the air. After a few seconds, repeat. An outing occasionally of

Paddle Light and this grading exercise will do a great deal to improve the individuals and the crew. The first two grading exercises the cox can call: “Light, Grade, Firm, Grade, Row,” and similarly down, but after that no call from the cox; let the crew go with stroke. One eye on his blade is advisable. When Rowing six, go mad and tiger at your top. The “Strike! Lower!” exercise should come in occasionally.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

When possible, I make Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday hard-working days, and Monday, Wednesday and Friday easy days. These exercises can be practised on the easy days; and of the working days, on Tuesday, row two short pieces, such as one-and-a-half minutes and two-and-a-half minutes; on Thursday, perhaps one row of four minutes; and Saturday, one of seven minutes — that is a course for college or Henley rowing. Every day the last twenty strokes on the outward journey, “Row,” and the last twenty strokes into the boat-house, “Row.” And row, *really row*, these pieces; that is to say, let go at it your very hardest; do your utmost to drive your blade as fast and as far as possible through the water every stroke. Many oarsmen are much too kind to themselves in these rows, and so never give themselves a chance to learn how really to ROW. On the Saturday I like to get my crews’ work over before lunch and Monday’s row after lunch. That and the easy days keep a man fresh and keen. There is no fear of going stale [being overtrained. – P.M.]. Staleness is entirely mental and results from monotonous and uninteresting work.

WORK TWO CREWS TOGETHER

The best way to coach is to have two crews, and let the second crew keep in front of the first boat. The best coach in the world is the bows of a faster boat moving behind a crew; it keeps them concentrated. I have generally had two boats out together and have said practically nothing to the second boat. The Jesus second boats have bumped all the first boats of the other Cambridge colleges except First Trinity, and when I was coaching Thames, the second boat won the Thames Cup race at all the up-river regattas every year, and won the Grand at Molesey two or three times, beating the first eights of the other clubs. So the bows of a faster boat chasing a crew is the best coach.

RULE FOR COACHING

Also the first rule in coaching is: keep your mouth shut. Have patience and get the crew keen, and improvement will come from the daily row conditioning the muscles, through the unconscious action of the Subjective Mind which has free play with the keen but silent coach. Telepathy will pass his thought to the crew. I like to work crews the first term for a long time-race, so I put in a lot of long rows.

A YEAR’S WORK OUTLINED

I would recommend a crew’s work for the year to be as follows: At the beginning of the rowing year, work the club crews with the idea of a long race at the end of the first term.

If possible, start on a Thursday, and go in for the exercises given above each day that week, only rowing the twenty strokes at each end of the outing. The second week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, easy work with the above exercises, and on the Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, paddle the long course with several bursts of rowing of ten strokes, and finish with a row of thirty strokes. The next week, Tuesday, a one-and-a-half minute row and a two-and-a-half minute row, Thursday a four minutes row, and Saturday long course, rowing the last mile. The next week, Tuesday and Thursday as before, and Saturday a full long course. The next week, Wednesday and Saturday a twenty-mile outing, every now and again paddling light, grading, and rowing ten strokes; the other days easy work. Then a long course rowing on Tuesday and Saturday, then a couple of weeks Tuesday one-and-a-half minutes, Thursday four minutes, and Saturday a long course. The next week a long course and some sharp pieces, and then the race on the Head of the River principle. If the one club rows alone, give the boats a handicap allowance. The second boat can pace the first boat its long course, and can do a long course on the Thursday with the first boat pacing it; and on the one-and-a-half minutes and four minutes rows handicap the boats to get level finishes; the second boat can get a start of about half a length for the one-and-a-half minutes, and a length-and-a-half for the four minutes rows, and the two crews race. In pacing the long course the second boat can start level from the half-way the first time, and the first boat half a length down from the half-way, and then handicap to get a level finish. The handicap should be about a second for each minute. If, for example, the course is a fifteen minutes row, the first boat gives the second boat fifteen seconds, and the second gives the third fifteen seconds, and so on. After the first Week a race of about two minutes daily on the easy days can be done, handicapping the second boat. This wants a lot of care. If one crew owing to the handicap runs away, stop the race and alter the handicap. A bad handicap is apt to take one crew off its legs, and this does harm to both crews, cowing one and making the other over-confident. That is the first term's work. The second and third terms, start as in the first term; get some long work in early and perhaps two long course rows during the term; and the last three weeks, one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half minutes on Tuesday, four minutes on Thursday and full course on Saturday, getting the two crews to pace each other, handicapping to equalise them. That is a skeleton schedule for a year's work.

EYES SHUT

A very good exercise is rowing with the eyes shut. This helps an oarsman to feel the timing and rhythm, and helps to weld him into the crew better than anything. Rowing with the eyes open blinds the oarsman to a certain extent to welding together. Many an oarsman has little sense of rowing together with his eyes open, but directly he shuts his eyes, it opens his eyes to the best way to learn to row. I played golf in a thick fog once. We could not see the ball after it left the club head. I was playing with a professional; we both hit every ball very true, straight down the middle of the course, and I was usually a very erratic golfer. We both sensed exactly what we had done every stroke, and knew exactly where our balls had gone. I met that pro twenty years after and at once he talked about that day's wonderful work in the fog. So we get the anomaly that the thing that opens an oarsman's eyes most to rowing is rowing with his eyes shut. One of the

earliest things that happened in my rowing career impressed on me how one can look out of the boat without doing harm. The bows of the boat behind in the May Races were getting very near, and directly behind my blade, so I threw the water at the boat, at the finish of each stroke, and washed them off. *Every man in our crew saw it*; that was the first proof I had of the fallacy of “Eyes in the boat.” If eyes in the boat meant only concentrate, that would be very good. Keeping time comes entirely through feel, and not by eyesight at all. In fact, all rowing comes in unconsciously by the action of the Subjective Mind. I do not advocate a young oarsman looking about casually and losing concentration, but he can learn a lot from the intelligent and unrestricted use of his eyes.

A man told me he played golf by moonlight, and had the same sense of what had happened as we had playing in the fog. So shutting the eyes opens the senses.

Chat XII

Body-form

HOW THE BODY MOVES NATURALLY

Though I think it is a mistake to coach for body-form, still one should know how the body should move. The Subjective Mind has been working the body all one's life, controlling its every movement, working it correctly and unconsciously. Every time one stoops down to pick anything up from the ground he makes exactly the same movements as an oarsman does when swinging forward. His hand will start out with the thought: "This has to pick up the object," and the objective mind will hold that thought, and the movements of the limbs will be unconscious. The shoulders will start down towards the object unconsciously, and the knees will bend to allow the body to get down. The knee movement is the same as the slide movement in a boat. Hands, body and knees (slide) will all move in perfect time. So one moves correctly when picking up anything, but does it unconsciously. No one thinks of how he moves his hands, body and knees, but they work harmoniously in perfect time.

LET THE OAR LEAD

In rowing it is best to think of starting the hands first — "let the oar lead" — then the body, and let the body swing up the slide. That may be the chronological order of the movements of the limbs. Or they may all start together. But it is human to err, and it is important that nothing starts before the oar, and especially that the slide does not begin first, as the knees rising first would impede the oar being brought forward. If the oarsman concentrates on working the oar it will naturally lead, and the body and slide would harmonise unconsciously.

DON'T CRAMP THE ELBOWS

The oarsman should sit balanced evenly on both buttocks and think of swinging evenly on the medial line. That is to say*, he should think of bringing the weight of his body on to the stretcher between his feet*. To do this, the knees should open naturally and the body swing down between them. The body should reach naturally the furthest it can. Row the oar through with full power and without effort, and the shoulders should come right forward in their sockets. The shoulders can move the oar a foot if allowed to play in their sockets freely fore and aft. The elbows should be drawn back in their strongest position, which is not the position that used to be taught, namely close past the sides. Each man can tell by drawing at the oar which is their strongest position; the Subjective Mind always knows. It is certainly keeping the elbows freely away from the body, not cramped at the sides, as is far too much done now [still true in the 21st Century. – P.M.]; scullers especially want the elbows far away from the sides. I find many oarsmen pull their inside knee inwards, and so check the body swinging forward. This is done by the oarsman unconsciously pulling at the straps to pull up the rigger by the foot. It is a very

common fault and comes from the rolling boat; it comes in quite unconsciously. If coach and oarsman will study and practise my remarks on balance, and give all attention to getting a boat level, this knee action will not happen.

POSITION OF THE HANDS

Getting a boat level is everything. Any fool can row a level boat. Some men row with their hands a foot apart. That is another sign of the instability of the boat. Widening the grip of the hands creeps in, also done unconsciously to steady the boat, as one has more balancing power, but less propelling power with the hands widely spread. The correct position for the hands is: the outside hand on the end of the oar and then about a hand's breadth between them.

NO STRAIGHT BACKS

The old teaching of holding the back straight is wrong. The back should be allowed to bend naturally with a whaleboney action to get the full reach forward and back, and the shoulders should be allowed to play as far forward as possible. Holding the back straight is stiff and tiring, and it throws the stomach forward and shortens the stroke. Holding the head upright, stiff, and thrown back is even worse. It also throws the stomach forward. The head plays a very prominent part in balancing the body by a slight downward movement towards the finish. The body should be held firmly braced, taut, elastic, and whaleboney, and not allowed to sit sloppily and loose. There used to be a good deal of teaching to hold the shoulders square in their sockets, and not allow them to play. This made the reach shorter and destroyed the elasticity.

THE ELBOWS

The elbows should not be held rigidly straight, but elastic and alive. Taking the water at full reach is certainly correct, but have the elbows always ready to bend. Locking the elbows to hold them straight is fatal.

NO HEELSTOPS

Many oarsmen have stiff ankles, and the heels are apt to come off the stretcher to let the body reach out. It is a common custom to put heelstops behind the feet to hold them firmly against the stretcher. This only checks the stiff jointed man's reach and makes him very short. Two of the best oarsmen that I have known had stiff ankles. They used to let the heels come right off the stretcher coming fully a couple of inches away from the stretcher. This allowed them to reach out. They got a very powerful beginning as they drove their heels back into the stretcher. It is the custom to have heelstops. This holds the heels on to the stretcher. How many men get sore heels from this? It would be far better to have no heelstops. A loose clog permitting freedom of movement in the heel is the best in my opinion.

DRIVE THE BODY OUT

In swinging back, the body should be driven out. The old idea of holding the back straight was all wrong. It held the lower part of the body much further forward at the finish, and so shortened as well as stiffened the stroke. Let anyone examine the movement by sitting upright in a chair and swinging back with the back straight, and then push out the lower part of the body, and he will at once see how much longer and harder he can apply his weight by driving the back bellied out like the wind bellies out a sail, and he is in the best position at the finish to whip the oar round the turn. Driving the back out allows the whole of the weight to come on at once, and by carrying *the lower part of the body* as far back as possible, it gives a longer and harder stroke, though it does not look as if the shoulders travelled as far because the lower part of the body goes so much further back. Holding the back straight means holding the legs out of action to a great extent, because to get full use one must push the body out stretched. Also by holding the back straight one must hold the lower part of the body much more forward than by driving the lower part of the body right out. This latter action allows the oar to be rowed home several inches further than it can be with a straight back, and so the blade can be rowed very much further through the water. If at the finish of the stroke — when the lower part of the body is driven right out — one were to straighten the back holding the lower part right out the shoulders would go very far back, and the body would be almost lying down. Then one would see that the stroke with the body driven right out was much longer than the stroke with the back held straight.

STRAIGHT BACKS GIVE ONLY AN ILLUSION OF LENGTH

The natural action that my crews all come to is: driving the lower part of the body right out, carrying the oar further back and making it much easier to row the oar round the finishing turn, and rowing the blade much further through the water, so that the weight is propelling the blade longer than it does with the longer-looking body swing of the stiff straight back. The art of rowing is to row the blade as far through the water as possible, and that is done by driving the lower part of the body out as far as possible and so allowing the handle of the oar to be rowed further home than it can be rowed with a straight back. That is the explanation of what puzzled the English rowing world when the Belgians came three times to Henley early this century and won the Grand each time [1906, 1907, 1909. – P.M.]. Their bodies looked to be swinging shorter than the English crews because their backs were rounded. I had begun coaching Jesus crews again, and they, like the Belgians, were very successful, and had the appearance of being shorter than the other English crews. When I started coaching London, I often got Ted Phelps, the Sculling Champion [1908-1983, winner of both Doggett's Coat and Badge and the World Professional Singles Title in 1930, son of Bossie Phelps. – P.M.], to row in the eight, and people on the launch frequently asked me why was he rowing short. I pointed out his blade was rowing the longest and hardest of the crew, and that therefore his Weight was moving longest on the oar. That was the fundamental difference between what was called my style and the old style with its straight back, and it made my crews — like the Belgians — look to be rowing short, whereas really the blades, and consequently the weight of the bodies, were rowing longer than the illusory straight-backed brigade; and

the Belgians and my crews were winning every time; the crew that rows longest always wins. I always used to coach: “Hit her with the tail bone,” meaning, “concentrate on that part of the body where the backbone ends.” “Put your back into it” will throw the concentration on to taking the weight about six inches up the back.

SUMMARY OF BODY MOVEMENT

The body movement in slow motion would show something like this: just as the oarsman is arriving at the full reach forward, the weight comes off the slide and gathers on the stretcher, and the feet push the behind away, and somewhat upward, and so stretch the body, and hang the weight on to the lower part of the back. Really that is putting the whole back into it. Then as the draw couples with the drive, the top part of the body is driven right back with all the weight applied, and the body carries further past the perpendicular than it can with the back held straight. The thought should be: come down on to the stretcher and stand on it. Imagine that at the moment of the catch the oar and boat got fixed immovably, and the seat disappeared, and one had to hang there. To do that he would have to keep pushing the behind away. So in rowing one should use the behind as a propelling weight. The more one thinks of holding the back straight and getting the shoulders over, the heavier one sits on the seat, and the less one uses the legs. Drive your behind to hit the rowing-pin and stand on it, and row standing up; do not row for showy form which is rowing sitting down. As regards the use of the feet I have frequently heard a discussion as to whether one used the heels and the ball of the foot, or only the ball of the foot. Think only of coming on to the stretcher, and springing off it, and our old pal, the Subjective Mind, will do the rest; and as you spring think of pulling, or, shall we say, hauling or heaving at an invisible rope. To get a true heave the heels must be put into the work. I used to get good results from “drive your heels through the stretcher.”

Chat XIII

The foundation of rowing for beginners,
but good practise for all

FOUNDATION OF WATERMANSHIP

If beginners will concentrate on the points gone into here, they will get a knowledge of watermanship that will be invaluable. For instance, the exercise of flicking both sculls on to the balance, and bringing them forward with a swinging balanced movement, will give them a feeling of swinging sculls, oar, body, and slide forward correctly. That means all the difference between clumsiness and the poetry of motion; all the difference between rolling the boat and holding it steady; all the difference between breaking the rhythm and true timing; all the difference between a rushing and straining and tiring effort, and floating forward at perfect rest.

SHORTEN UP TO ROW LONG, COUPLING THE DRAW WITH THE CATCH

Again making everything very short at first allows the beginner to get control, and to make the movements truly. Making everything short at first is the real way to get long; it is the way to get the stroke true, and once one gets the stroke true, one will row with true action longer and longer. It is trying to row long that breaks the rhythm. So, if you want to row long, shorten up, and true length will come. And this is the only way to get long. It allows one to get the catch truly, and to bring in the draw coupled with the catch which means continuous application of the weight. Coupling the draw with the catch is the most difficult of all to get correctly.

As one drives the body outstretched and springs off the stretcher, one has to use this moving stretched weight by drawing at the oar. All the legs do is to spring the body off the stretcher and start it flying towards the bows. The hands have to apply this moving weight to propel the boat by pulling or drawing at the handle of the oar. Rowing is pulling. So the hands have to be elastic and alive, no locked elbows; body braced and taut; no sloppy slackness; and the hands pull the oar straight into the body at once. As the oarsman comes on to the stretcher, he must have the oar gripped firmly, ready to apply all that moving weight to the rowing-pin at once. To put it in another way, as the oarsman pushes his weight off the stretcher, instantly he must pull it on to the rowing-pin. Coupling the drive and draw is about the most difficult art of timing in rowing. Once it has been got correctly, the oarsman will be able to row truly his full weight the length which the condition of his muscles will allow him to row. Eliminating all tendency to overreach gives truth of action, and truth of action gives length. So if you want to row long, shorten up, and you will find out how to row long. Learn to couple the spring with the draw, and the blade will come through true; the water will swirl up behind the blade, and *that swirl is the index of the first-class oarsman*. To get this coupled action, the oarsman must be knit and gathered as he springs off the stretcher, gripping the oar

firmly and elastically, and he must be prepared to push and throw away as big a weight of water as he can. This is only done by being braced and firmly knit and elastic, and *the greater the weight of water he pushes the less he will feel it*. Here is another anomaly: the greater the weight of water an oarsman pushes with the blade of his oar the less weight he feels. Learn this coupling action; it is the foundation of all rowing, and the more this is learnt the better oarsman will the learner become.

START BY SCULLING IN A ROOMY BOAT

Anyone wanting to learn to row should, if possible, start by sculling. He should start in a big roomy boat. A half-outrigged boat would be best. It is easy to sit, and so he gets over the initial stages much easier. At Eton, the novices scull in this type of boat and so found their watermanship correctly. It is not always possible to get this type of boat, and most would-be scullers have to begin in whiffs [a fairly wide sculling boat used for training. – P.M.] or best boats. The lighter the boat is, the greater is the difficulty of balance. The more the boat rolls about, the more it makes sculling unhappy work for the beginner. Understanding and learning how to get and keep a boat steady is necessary to make sculling comfortable. That is really the whole of watermanship. The trouble with oarsmen is that they give no thought to watermanship. They get into a boat and commit innumerable mistakes that make a boat roll, and are quite unaware of having done anything wrong.

SHORT STROKES AT FIRST

I have started many men sculling in whiffs, and have made them begin with a very short stroke with one scull, and then with the other. After a time I let them row with both sculls very short. They will row very short for a few strokes, and get a little confidence, and say to themselves, “Now I’ll take a full stroke,” and they start forward, and in a flash go overboard.

HANDLING THE SCULLS

The first thing to do is to learn to control the boat by handling the sculls correctly. If all oarsmen would learn that before they try anything else, they should become efficient in managing the oar or sculls to keep the boat level, then rowing as well as sculling would come to them much more quickly, and much more pleasantly, and much more truly. We will start with a beginner in a whiff. He should be put into the boat, shown how to sit balanced, and how to take hold of his sculls, gripping them with the fingers, with the thumbs over the ends pressing the buttons firmly against the rowlocks. Then he should be pushed into the stream and told to keep the blades flat on the water, and to hold his hands close together, and close into, but not touching, his body. Then he should be shown how to grip the sculls in his fingers, and to put the thumbs on the ends of the sculls, and press the sculls up against the rowlocks, so that the buttons are firmly pressed against the rowlocks. Then holding the sculls firmly in his hands, and with a forward swinging movement of the scull he should lift the blade of one scull into the air and put it on to the water again. To do this he must hold the other rigger firm, the first

step in watermanship. Then with the same swinging movement, flick the other blade into the air. To do this, I repeat, hold the opposite rigger firm; that gives control. If he feels the boat roll he should bring both hands close together and put the blades flat on the water to steady the boat, and regain control! He should repeat, flicking first one blade and then the other into the air frequently, always swinging the blades forward. He must feel he is pressing the buttons firmly against the rowlocks. Pressing the sculls against the rowlocks is very important and it is similarly very important when rowing to press the button against the rowlock. I call it Lateral Pressure. In sculling it can be done mostly by the thumbs pressing on the ends of the sculls, but in rowing it is done by the thumb and little finger of the inside hand pressing the button against the rowlock. It gives control and a lively spring. It so to speak screws the oarsman into his boat like screwing a machine into its bed.

THE TURNS

The next exercise is to flick both sculls into the air with a forward swinging movement. Again, short at first, gradually increasing in length, till he can swing the sculls to full reach of the arms and square the blades, and sit balanced with the blades in the air. Squaring the blades sculling is done the same way as squaring the blade rowing: with a pressure of the ball of the hand, the sculls are rolled forward on to the square, with a throwing movement into the finger grips, the thumbs pressing the buttons against the rowlocks all the time. This pressure, especially in sculling, draws the oarsman out forward. The wrists should be held steelily firm, and not turned at all, or, at any rate, as little as possible. So here is another anomaly: these turns are called wrist-work and should be done without moving the wrists. Just as the sculls are rolled on to the square from palm to fingers with a throw when squaring the blade forward, so at the finish the sculls are rolled on to the feather with a rotary movement as if starting to spin the blade round and round, the sculls being thrown from the fingers to the ball of the hand, and so struck on to the balance, while the wrist is held steelily firm and does not turn at all. The two turns are sleight-of-hand tricks, and an oarsman’s proficiency varies in the direct ratio of his proficiency in making these turns. This forward swinging movement of the sculls is difficult to get, and the more practise one gives it the better. The “Strike! Lower!” exercise, which I give elsewhere, should be done with the same swinging movement, not a straight up and down action.

ONE SCULL AT A TIME

The next exercise should be a stroke with one scull, holding the boat level with the other scull, this again very short to start with. The sculler should confine his attention to being sure that the loom of the scull — especially the lower part — has made contact with the rowing-pin, and he should feel that he is holding the other rigger firmly controlled with the other scull. If in sculling one has trouble with one scull, he should see that he has a firm control of the other rigger; that is generally where the trouble lies. The rule in rowing is: don’t let your rigger rise, and you will give the other side a chance. In fact, that is practically the foundation of watermanship.

After several strokes with one scull, take several with the other scull, all quite short. Then row one scull after the other, short and fast. Learning to make the movements fast is of the utmost importance. This exercise can be repeated with one scull after the other for a long time, getting gradually a little longer. Then, again very short, row a stroke with both sculls rowing them on to the feather, with hands close together and just started away from the body, and hold the sculls balanced in the air. After a good many single strokes row two strokes and finish on the balance and then three, and so on. Then practise sitting with the sculls balanced in the air. And, when sculling, occasional strokes in the air will be a great help to balance.

BACKWATERING

The next exercise, and a very important one, is learning to backwater. This is not taught nearly enough in rowing or sculling. It helps one's watermanship very much. This should be started, one scull at a time. Very short at first with especial attention to not pressing the rowlock down as one backwaters. That takes a lot of learning. When backwatering, one is much more liable to press the rigger down than when rowing. Go through backwatering exercises just the same as rowing, short with one scull and then the other, and then one quick after the other, and then both together. When one has done this, paddle on a few strokes, and stop the boat by backwatering, and backwater a few strokes. Practise this till one can stop the boat and start it moving back in one backwatering movement. This backwatering will bring on one's watermanship very much.

And now the best exercise of the lot. It was suggested to me by the Jesus boatman with whom I have been going through the whole story of rowing this year. He is extremely proficient, and I hope that he will carry on rowing when I am gone. It is terribly plain to me that there is a tendency for rowing to go in for exaggerations and lose its natural efficiency, and I am hoping the Jesus boatman will keep Jesus rowing on the right track, and through him the rest of the rowing.

TURNING THE SCULLING BOAT

This exercise is turning a sculling boat, rowing with one scull, and backing with the other. The sculler should turn the boat completely round, pulling with the right scull and backing with the left, and then reversing, pulling with the left, and backing with the right. He should work at this till the movements of the hands are equal and opposite, as the right hand pulls right through, the left should push equally far back. This will do more for cleverness than anything, and will teach a man to use the draw muscles properly, and it will harden them. So do plenty of turning the sculling boat round. In the same way, one should turn the tub pair as hard as possible both ways.

BALANCE

Another exercise to practise is to turn the sculls completely round on the feather. And the best exercise is to sit with the blades balanced high in the air.

THESE EXERCISES TEACH WATERMANSHIP

These are all very simple exercises but a month's sculling and practising these exercises would turn a beginner into a budding waterman. Pressing the thumbs on the end of the sculls to hold the sculls against the rowlocks will give the sculler firmness, and if he practises pressing them thus all through the forward swing, he will feel this pressure drawing him forward. Flicking the blades into the air and swinging them forward is an absolutely invaluable exercise. Once this action is got and thoroughly understood, there will be no danger of a break at the finish of the endless chain movement — the most important movement of all — and the beginner will be well on the road to acquiring the springing hit that gives the tap-the-boat-along action, which really means using his full power, at full length, at the gallop so truly, that it merely feels a continuity of taps. Beginners in eights or fours would benefit very much from a month of these exercises. Getting that swing-the-oar-forward feeling and learning to hold the oar balanced and held firmly against the rowlock would make all the difference to a beginner.

PRACTISE, THINK, AND WORK

As I have said, the beginner does not think these things out. There are a lot of difficulties to overcome, and the beginner gets tangled up by not knowing them. He is like a piece of string which is badly tangled up, whereas by practising these exercises he is learning to untangle, which is the art of watermanship. As I frequently say, a man is a better oarsman after ten years than after five, the reason is that these movements that I am advising take a very long time to become a stereotyped part of the oarsman's movements, owing to his not understanding, and consequently not practising, them. Mileage makes Champions, because the whole muscular system has to be conditioned. One must not think that by learning watermanship through these exercises that nothing more is needed. He will still require plenty of honest, long, hard work.

Chat XIV

Mileage makes Champions

in these days when the civilised human race pass their time mostly in offices, some form of exercise is necessary to restore the balance between their physical and mental parts. The old saying “a healthy mind in a healthy body” is very true, and the mental portion of a human being must suffer if the physical part does not get enough exercise to make the blood circulate healthily, and to make the other organs function correctly.

ROWING A GLORIOUS EXERCISE

Rowing is an ideal exercise for keeping one in health. It can be carried out in all weathers, and in company or alone if no company is available. Rowing exercises all the joints and muscles, and it teaches one to synchronise the movements of all the limbs, which is harmony, and when one has mastered the intricacy of the art of rowing, one can move all his limbs in perfect harmony. It is a wonderfully glorious feeling, springing and stretching at the full reach, and using all one’s powers harmoniously throughout the stroke, and then floating forward at perfect rest, feeling the boat gliding away; feeling that one is using his material body correctly; feeling he is carrying out the soul and spirit of the exercise. One loses all material consciousness and realises gloriously that he is in tune with the infinite.

SKIPPING – WEIGHT-LIFTING – WALKING

Long daily rows are the best thing to improve one’s rowing, but this cannot always be got, and other exercises can be substituted. Possibly the best form of exercise, and the one most easily got, is skipping [rope]. Half an hour’s healthy skipping first thing in the morning and last thing at night should keep anyone that cannot get any other form of exercise in good health. It is an exercise that can be carried on all one’s life, so that an oarsman, if he skips daily in the off-seasons during his rowing career, will have got an exercise that he can continue with great benefit all through his life; but mostly will he reap the benefit from 60 years of age onwards, having laid the foundation of a healthy old age. Skipping synchronises the movements of all the limbs, and makes a man a better athlete, because the capacity for athletics is proportionate to one’s ability to move one’s limbs in harmony. Blacksmiths have been world champions at boxing and sculling, and one of the world’s fastest bowlers was a blacksmith. So one and all would be well advised to get plenty of heavy-weight lifting, or regular exercise with a skipping rope; a pair of dumb-bells are useful in the off-season, and both skipping and dumb-bells should be used fast to exercise the lungs thoroughly. Walking is the best exercise of the lot, it should also be done fast, starting swinging along and gradually increasing till one can keep putting away his five miles an hour.

My eldest brother [George] came back from Cambridge in the seventies and told me that plenty of long days’ walking was good for athletics. I used to put in forty-mile walks

frequently in the holidays. We used to swim in the sea a mile from school every morning, and I used to run down to the baths; do a 100 yards fast swim and run back to school.

MILEAGE MAKES CHAMPIONS

One holiday I walked across Tasmania, 120 miles; we started at about 10 o'clock one morning carrying billies and food, as we intended to camp out. We cooked a meal and walked on, and settled to sleep about 11 p.m. We slept badly and started our next day's walk about 5 a.m. and decided no more camping out. We finished our allotted distance by mid-day, but felt lonely after lunch, and learning there was a hotel six miles further on, we walked on to it. It had been turned into a private house and the next hotel was nineteen miles on; we arrived at midnight and were within about thirty miles of our destination; in thirty-seven hours we had done ninety miles.

My continuity of exercise fitted me for all games, and whilst I was at school I played football for the town team, and the papers wrote me down as the best footballer in Victoria, and not among mugs. Good judges told me that our team compared favourably with the famous All Black New Zealand team. Also I was picked to bowl in a cricket match in preference to George Palmer [George Eugene "Joey" Palmer, 1859-1910, played in 17 test matches between 1880 and 1886. – P.M.], who bowled with Spofforth [Frederick Robert Spofforth, 1853-1926, "The Demon", Australia's first truly fast bowler. – P.M.] for Australia just afterwards. It also enabled me to win the 440 Yards and the Hurdle Race and the High Jump, and to get second in the Long Jump, Putting the Weight, and the 100 Yards (though I broke the tape and really won it). That was in the United Schools Sports of Victoria, a performance that has never been equalled. I always won the long distance swimming race at school, and the boy who was second to me swam in the town races and beat the champion of Victoria. These are some encouraging results of regular long work. I began early running the Under 12 race in the United Schools Sports for four years. I ran ten years in these sports. I gave my sons plenty of long walks early in life, and one won the Heavy Weight Schools' boxing, put up a record for Throwing the Hammer, and stroked the Eton eight. The other was a crack skater at eight years, and a crack golfer at fourteen years of age, and bowled for a good M.C.C. team in the West Indies when about eighteen years of age. So once more, Mileage makes Champions.

My crews have been more successful than any other crews. I used to row to Ely and back with them in the days when I began coaching again. Possibly the two lightest and least experienced crews that won the Grand were the Jesus 1885 crew [11 st. 3 lbs.] and the Thames 1923 crew [11 st. 9¼ lbs.]. Both those crews did many long rows. I used to row the 1885 crew to Ely on Monday and back to Cambridge on Saturday, and Thames did many a long row in the 1923 crew, which was the best crew of its weight I have ever seen. In the preceding winter, they used to put in twenty miles on the Sunday, a great deal of it racing other crews. My first outing on the Thames was in a Rob Roy canoe. I paddled from Putney to Henley in the day, about sixty miles, as I went up the river Wey by mistake. A week after that I walked from London to Inverness, over 600 miles.

Brittain, "The Jesus College Boat Club"

1885 Jesus College 1st Mays Boat
Head of the River, Grand Challenge Cup Winners

Top: 4 E.P. Alexander 12 st. 1 lb., Coach T.E. Hockin,
3 H.A. Armytage 10 st. 7 lb., 2 L.P. Bevan 10 st. 5 lb.,
Bow H.S.J.A. Sanford 10 st. 4 lb., 7 Steve Fairbairn 12 st. 13 lb.,
Bottom: Coxswain C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe 8 st. 9 lb.,
6 A.M. Hutchinson 11 st. 7 lb., Stroke C.H. Bicknell 10 st. 3 lb.,
5 J.W. Dickson 11 st. 2 lb.

My longest day's rowing was at the Bedford Regatta in 1887. I sculled and rowed in the Tub Pairs, and Fours; three races in each. I started in the first race and rowed in every other race of the day, filling in the intermediate time sculling back and getting up to the start for the next race, and I danced till 4 o'clock in the morning, putting away over thirty miles more, as we danced very fast in those days.

My longest day's coaching was in the eighties, probably 1885. I took one crew at 9 a.m. over the course, next at 10 also over the course, next to Clayhythe 11 to 2. Then one at 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 o'clock, all over the course, and I rowed the course and we broke the record of that day. This involved over thirty miles in the saddle, driving every crew as hard as I could. The power to do these long days all comes from plenty of long work. "Mileage makes Champions" is coming into vogue very much more. I got a letter from the Continent from a man telling me he was rowing on my book, and that he had won the 80 kilometres sculling championship.

Thames Grand Crew, 1923

Coxswain John S. "Jack" Godwin 8 st., Stroke Ian Fairbairn 12 st. 2 lbs., 7 H.L. Holman 9 st. 11 lbs., 6 K.C. Wilson 11 st. 12 lbs., 5 Arthur F. "Bones" Long 11 st. 7 lbs., 4 Charles H. Rew 11 st. 4 lbs., 3 Jack Beresford Jr. 11 st. 6 lbs., 2 Reginald G. Bare 11 st. 6 lbs., Bow Edward C. "Cherub" Chandler 11 st.

Note the backs "driven out like a piece of rounded whalebone."

The London Rowing Club I coached for two years, and instituted long rows, and they, like Thames, have won the Grand three times since they took to long work.

Chat XV

Unscrew the tension nut

A parson gave a lunch to some of his pupils, and on taking the cover off the fish, he exposed a piece of cod that smelt. He looked puzzled, and said it was past understanding. Whereupon his prize scholar said: “Is that the piece of cod that passeth all understanding?”

NO ROWING FOR SHOW

So in rowing, if you give earnest attention to the soul and spirit of it, you can get the “Peace of God that passeth all understanding,” [Philippians iv 7] but if you row for show, personal glorification, etc., you will only get the piece of cod that smells, and some day you may realise: “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity, and vexation of spirit.” [Ecclesiastes i 14] The straight path to peace and contentment in rowing is to be got by eliminating all rush, worry, anxiety, and fear, and this is done by unscrewing the tension nut. When the machines for shearing sheep came into use in Australia there was a tension nut, and when anything went wrong the shearers would screw up the tension nut, and so I suppose put more effort into the machine, and so when anything goes wrong in a boat the oarsman stiffens himself and increases the tension, and so spoils his rowing. The art of success in athletics is to eliminate all effort — if you can’t do it easily you can’t do it at all. Aim for perfect ease and improvement will follow. Ease is not letting off the work, but getting all the ease into movements while working at your top. As the ease comes in, the rowing improves and so becomes more powerful.

THE WORRIED LOOK

To judge how a crew is rowing, one has only to look at the faces of the crew and get their expressions. If all the faces wear a peaceful contented look, there is not much the matter with their rowing. If an oarsman is wearing a worried look, it means that something is wrong. All rowing comes into a man unconsciously by the Subjective Mind, and if a man will concentrate each stroke on trying to propel the boat to the best of his ability, he will be doing his best, and his rowing will improve as quickly as possible. His capacity for improvement is governed by his athletic capacity plus the condition of his rowing muscles. The better the condition of his muscles the easier rowing will become. But the governing factor is his thought. There are many different thoughts that may govern a man’s rowing. As I have said, if he concentrates on trying to move the boat, that is the best thought he can have. If he rows to show body-form, hoping that thereby he will get his colours, that is not so good; and just in proportion to the amount of harm his rowing gets from the amount of thought he puts into trying to please the man on the bank, instead of trying to move the boat, in the same proportion will a worried look appear on his face. If he is concentrating on showing body-form he is losing the feeling of moving the boat with the rest of the crew. He is shutting the door on his capacity for welding, for getting together, and his Subjective Mind tells his conscience this, and he

gets worried, and it shows on his face. He is playing to the gallery, he is playing for self and not for side, he is lacking that great virtue, *esprit de corps*.

"FEAR NOTHING BUT FEAR"

There are many other things that induce a worried look. The boat rolls and it worries him, it shows on his face; he clutches his oar, and so worries more. He gets off his balance, and loses his timing and worries more. This worry is fear coming in, and fear is at the root of all evil. There is an old saying: "Fear nothing but fear." If the oarsman holds the right thought he will not have any fear. In a race an oarsman sees the other boat getting ahead or, in a bumping race, coming up, and he takes fright and rushes and so throws the boat back. A man's thought should never be even that he wants to beat his opponents; that brings in a wrong thought. If he feels he wants to beat them, it shows he is afraid he will not, and in his anxiety to beat them rush and hurry creep in. He should only think, "I want to do my best every stroke."

HOW TO CORRECT ROLLING

When the boat rolls, instead of getting panic stricken, he should think, "What can I do to steady it?" If one could look into the mind of every oarsman and see exactly how much each man was rolling the boat, I think he would see that the man who rolled the boat most, also got most worried, and this man would realise his own clumsiness least and think it was the other men who were rolling the boat. In other words, he gets into more of a panic than the others, and so does more harm. He should think, "Oh! the boat is rolling; very well, we'll set to work to stop that." Then he should note which side it is rolling on to. If the boat goes down on the other side, he can do a lot by holding his rigger firmly down, even to slicing his oar in and pulling it down, so giving the other side a rigger held firm, which makes their riggers firmer. It is generally one side letting the boat go over that rolls it, and if a man catches a crab through his rigger being low, it is the fault of the other side not holding their riggers firm enough. If the boat is down on his rigger, his best remedy is to take a breather and row short and light for a few strokes. He will, at any rate, get a breather and help to let his rigger come up. But it generally goes much further than this; he is very often the delinquent who is guilty of pulling the boat down, and by starting to ease up he releases the tension and stops worrying, and so rows better, and the boat comes up. Probably he will not realise that he was the guilty party, but if he takes a breather and looks at his blade, he will see it is rowing harder than ever, and he will feel that he is not worrying. By getting worried the oarsman turns himself into a clumsy piece of cast-iron and gets very heavy-handed, whereas by determining to take a breather and row light, he slacks up all the tension, and rows normally. As the boat comes down on one, one is very apt to stiffen and tighten the tension, and one unconsciously pulls the boat down more and more, and the whole side stiffen up and row worse and worse. There is nothing so horrible as the boat being down on one. The first remedy is to take a breather and so unscrew the tension nut; but if it goes on being down on me for some time, I have gathered all my watermanship and with a heavy feather under water, and a throw of all my weight on to my rigger, I have plunged the boat right down. The effect is wonderful; all the side let go their oars

(preparing to fall overboard probably) and thereby unscrew the tension nut, and the boat comes level. Instead of giving in and getting full of fear, one should just say: “All right, I will take a rest;” then the tension will go out of that oarsman, and a peaceful look come on his face.

DON’T FEAR ROLLING

The capacity for balance varies very much in oarsmen. Many an oarsman rows very well in a clinker boat, but in the light boat fear creeps in, and he loses all control. He should watch for that and see fear does not creep in. If he bears in mind the thought that, if the boat rolls, he will take a light stroke or two, that will help him. At the beginning of my rowing career there was an extraordinary case of a man who could row very well in a clinker eight, but was hopeless in the ‘Varsity Boat in the light ship. This man went by the name of Fresher Green, because he had won the Ladies’ Plate and the Visitors’ Cup at Henley as a Freshman, showing he could row all right in light boats at a fast stroke. My first year in the ‘Varsity Boat was Fresher’s fifth year of trial. He was rowing five, and I was rowing six. The first day we took to the light ship it was something awful; Fresher was puffing and groaning behind me, and pulling the boat down so badly that he made the saxe board creak. He lost his head when the boat rolled. If he had just watched what he was doing and kept his head, it would have been all right. He was tried for five years for the ‘Varsity but always broke down at once in the light ship.

IF YOU CAN’T DO IT EASILY, YOU CAN’T DO IT AT ALL

There is an old saying that one should always practise the three C’s, “Keep Quite Cool,” and if every oarsman did that always, each would be doing his best, there would be no tension, and the faces would all be quite placid, and then they would be able to keep quite calm, cool, and collected (the five K’s). By concentrating on doing one’s best to move the boat every stroke and by not allowing any tension to come in, one will get enjoyable rowing and will feel he has nothing to regret if he loses. One can tell if he has done his best in practise if the reaction after losing a race is peaceful and satisfactory. Of late years, on several occasions, men after being beaten have come to me and said: “Oh! Steve we had a lovely row.” That meant that that man had done his best in practise and the race. Enjoying a losing race is the greatest victory possible.

I have several maxims that tend to help to unscrew the tension nut. The first is: “If you can’t do it easily, you can’t do it at all.” That means that any effort destroys the rhythm. The next maxim is: “Never try to beat anybody; there is only one man you can beat, and that is yourself, so give him every chance, and only try to do your best every stroke.” The next: “No crew can win a race, but every crew can lose, and the one who tries to win most is the most likely to lose.” The greatest is: “Enjoying a losing race is the greatest victory.”

Directly you finish a race, watch your reactionary thought. If you lose and your work has been true, it will be that the other crew rowed well and deserved to win. If you win, it will be sympathy for the losers, and the hope that they win their next race.

Montmorency [R.H. de Montmorency, an Eton housemaster. – P.M.], possibly the best amateur golfer England has had, once said to me when I said I was off my game: “Shorten up your swing twenty yards.” I went out and played far and away the best round I ever played. I got a control of the shots I never had before or since, except on one occasion when I played in a match we made after dinner on a Saturday night, in which I challenged the other diners to play a foursome against any two of them with a partner I named. Two scratch players took us on; my partner was a 2 handicap, and I was a bad 8. On the first tee, in the kindness of their hearts, they gave us a start of two up. The match came to this: my partner said to me: “Put it there,” and I put it there, and we won 8 up and 7 to play. Playing with this partner, I resigned all thought to him, and so controlled my shots wonderfully, unscrewing the tension nut entirely, and, as I had no hesitation in saying, and they in agreeing with me, I played the best game of the four. I resigned my mental attitude to my partner and carried out his instructions, which were simple and easy, and I practically shortened up my swing twenty yards. I did the easy things my partner advised.

DON’T TRY TO DO TOO MUCH

And so it is always in all athletics, the next thing to do is the easiest you can do: “Put it there;” “Put the boat towards the winning post;” “Shorten up your swing 20 yards;” “Don’t bite off more than you can chew;” “Put it there” means putting it further and truer than any other train of thought will put it; “Shorten up your swing 20 yards” will check overreach, but it will give you a true movement, and that will be a longer swing with a truly balanced application of the weight of the body, a swing that you cannot get by trying to do too much, which all athletes are inclined to try to do. The whole difficulty in rowing, and in all athletics, is trying to do too much, and thereby breaking the rhythm. Let any golfer when off his game try shortening his swing 20 yards, and if he carries out this idea correctly, he will play a much better game, because he will ease the tension that comes in through trying to do too much. He will not shorten his swing; he will probably lengthen it, because he will keep on his balance, and his movements will be true. Let anyone try shortening his swing with an iron club, and keep one eye open to see the club come over his shoulder, and he will probably find that it swings further than it did when trying to swing further just before. This idea many rowing coaches have put into a saying: “If you want to row long, shorten up.” It means you will row true and so row your full length, whereas by making an effort to row long, you will break the rhythm, and will not apply the weight so long. Length in rowing is the length of time you apply your weight to the oar to keep the oar propelling the boat. An oarsman is told to swing out further; he tries to swing as far as he can, and makes an effort which results in rushing and breaking the rhythm; he feels he has swung a long way, but he cannot gather on his stretcher truly to spring, and so he cannot apply his weight properly to propel the boat. If he is told not to bite off more than he can chew, he at once comes forward truly, there is no rush or hurry in his movements, and he comes out easily and

confidently, the limbs moving harmoniously. So he comes out not only gathered to spring, but he has moved longer and quicker than when trying to swing before, but the movements being harmonious they are not jerky, and so do not catch the eye; and being truly gathered on his stretcher he gets a more powerful and longer application of his weight.

EASY AND DREAMY-LOOKING

The easier, and dreamier, and more swan-like the forward swing, the longer and faster it is, but the more restful it is, and so the more it becomes a true recovery, and less apparent. I first thoroughly realised this in the year 1886. There were a lot of magnificent professional scullers on the Thames, and they all seemed to me to be loafing along without any attempt at working. One day I went out to scull and go with some of them. A couple came up towards me, and as they got level they passed me like a flash of lightning. I then learnt that the truer one's forward swing is, the more it will approach a lazy-looking float. The truer an oarsman's movements are, the more easy they will look. The forward swing is merely the reactionary opposite of the stroke. The harder the stroke, the easier the forward swing will be. About the same time there was a very good Oxford oarsman, David Brown [David Edward Brown, b. 1858, Boat Race winner 1880-82, multiple winner of the Stewards' Cup and Silver Goblets. – P.M.], who had the same dreamy-looking floating forward swing. One day I was standing on the bank at Henley, watching him rowing in a pair. He looked to be loafing, and I felt disappointed as I wished to see him working. The boat was near the bank, and as he passed me, I saw his blade was driving terrifically hard. This oarsman had done some rowing with Jimmy Hastie, and he got this action from him. He rowed in a remarkable four [1881-82 Stewards' Cup winners. – P.M.], Lowndes [Jefferson Lowndes, 1858-1893. – P.M.] stroke, a Blue [no] and winner of the Diamonds five times I think [yes]; Brown [see above] an Oxford (7) 3; Buck [Edward Buck, b. 1859, Boat Race winner 1880-82. – P.M.] 2, an Oxford (6); Roberts [George Quinlan Roberts, b. 1860, 1883 Boat Race Winner. – P.M.] bow, an Oxford (7); they made a wonderfully good four, the best I have ever seen. They had no marked showy movements in their action. I made my first appearance at Henley in a four [1882], and we worked with them. Lowndes one day said to me: "You will win the Wyfolds, but they won't like your style." Our four was similar in style to this four, but not so advanced. We won the Wyfolds in a walk, and they walked away with the Stewards'. So unscrew the tension nut, float dreamily forward, no show, no playing to the gallery; that is the way to row.

I am going to give one or two experiences I had, that opened my eyes to the necessity of ease and understanding the principles of athletics in order to succeed in athletics.

A remarkable instance that occurred to me was the following: I was playing cricket; I had not played cricket after I left school for twelve years, then I took to playing in the Wednesday matches for the Melbourne Cricket Club. One Saturday I happened to be at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and their side was a man short in an important match, and the captain asked me to play, and put me in to bat very early. This was a tall order, as there were four international cricketers and two Inter-State players on the side. Starting to run I broke a muscle in the calf of my leg. The leg was so bad I could not rest

any weight on it so had to balance myself on the other leg altogether, and barely touch the ground with the bad leg, and I had to get a man to run for me. I suggested to the other batsman that I ought to retire, but he was very much against it, so I stayed in. At once the bowling seemed to become very easy and I was astonished to find the little taps that sent the ball to the boundary. At the finish of the day's play, nine wickets were down, and we were still behind the other's score, so it was lucky I did not go out. I was asked how many runs I had made, and I said I thought about thirty. I was very surprised to read in the evening paper that I had made over seventy. Now the moral was this: I was incapacitated. I absolutely could not move out of the way of a fast ball, or move my body in any way, so with the body not moving, I saw the ball truly and made top score amongst a lot of first-class cricketers, and with no effort the ball was off to the boundary time after time. I stood balanced and controlled, practically on one leg. So by my being incapacitated from any erroneous movement, cricket became easy.

Another episode I remember was shooting rooks. I put on my telescopic sights and tried them. For the first two or three shots I moved as I fired to get my eye outside the sights, to see if the rook was falling, and I missed sometimes; then I happened to see the rook start to fall whilst I was still looking through the sights, and then I looked for the result of the shot through the sights, and after that I killed every rook. What happened at the first few shots was that I moved my head just before pulling the trigger to see if the bird was killed, and so unconsciously moved the rifle out of alignment. When looking through the sights afterwards to see if the bird was falling I never moved the head or rifle. So, as with my bad leg at cricket, the body remained still, and great success followed in both cases. It is the same as keeping the eye on the ball at golf, and the same as playing golf in a fog (See EYES SHUT above). It is over-anxiousness that destroys our game. The rush and movement, etc., will act in inverse ratio to one's confidence in himself, and his confidence will be in direct proportion to his understanding. So study and think about what rowing is, and the more you grasp the true idea, the more confident will you become, and the more will you eliminate tension and effort. It is the unconscious introduction of erroneous movements, through anxiety, that kills one's athletic capacity. Everyone has got to learn at any game that if you can't do it with ease, you can't do it at all. Somewhat similar to my incapacitated leg was a practise at cricket to peg a batsman's right leg down with a hoop so that he could not move; this no doubt was very good. Also similar to my looking on through the sights to see the bird fall, is the Army instruction, "Declare your aim," which means, "keep on looking along the sight and see where the rifle is pointing after the shot is fired." This also eliminates the tendency to move before the trigger is pulled. Acquiring the knowledge that one is very apt to move before the shot or stroke is made, and so ruin it, helps a man a great deal. We get the same thing at golf. Keep your eye on the ball is the most frequent advice given. The golfer in the same way looks up to see the flight of his ball before the club has struck it, and so ruins the shot by moving his body. J.H. Taylor, our most frequent English golfing champion [1894, 1895, 1900, 1090, 1913 – P.M.], used to put his cap a yard or two behind the ball when making a stroke, and pick it up before looking for the flight of the ball. This ensured the body not moving. The same ideas in rowing are: "At the finish, sit back," so as to be sure you have finished the stroke, and at the beginning, when forward, "poise,"

so as to be sure the loom of the oar makes contact with the rowing-pin before you spring.

Every stroke well and thoughtfully rowed makes one a little better, and if one watches the Jesus men practising on the fixed tubs in their first year, one will see that those who practise most get their first boat colours quickest. So think out what rowing is, and practise as much as possible, and as you realise what the oar is doing throughout the stroke, so will the tendency to rush and hurry go, and so will you find that it gets easier and easier to row a stroke, and more and more enjoyable.

Knowing what the oar is doing enables one to do the right thing, and that brings in ease, and doing the right thing frequently fits the muscles; and it is getting the muscles fit that makes the oarsman. So once again: “Mileage Makes Champions.” If, on reading this, you think I have repeated some points too often, just read those points again. It will improve you.

ROWING IN A NUTSHELL

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

(1936)

eBook Edition 2014

www.rowperfect.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

BY T.B. LANGTON

I have, with Steve's permission, changed a few odd words here and there in the original [manuscript] of this pamphlet; but Steve has the knack of getting his meaning across to the reader in an amazing way.

If you read this pamphlet through casually, you will probably not agree with my last remark. But if you read it again bit by bit, and dwell upon each point until you have understood it, you will realise how well Steve explains such a difficult subject. What is more, you will find in each point a wealth of interest, and if you will follow the instructions which you will read herein, you will find an unbelievable enjoyment in your rowing, and, for that matter, in any sport in which rhythm, balance, and true timing are essential.

Steve has been accused of repetition in his writings. But repetition, in other words, practise, is the essence of rowing as a sport. The more you practise, the cleverer and better you become, and the more you enjoy it. The perfect oarsman is an impossibility; so continue to practise and see how near you can get to the impossible. When Steve talks about "the beginner" in the following pages, don't forget that he means YOU; for even though you've won every race for the last fifteen years, there is still ample room for improvement in you.

ROWING IN A NUTSHELL

The first thing a beginner should learn is control of the oar so as not to roll the boat. There are three essentials.

1. Lateral Pressure. That is, exercise a pressure on the oar to keep the button in touch with, and pressing against, the rowlock all through the stroke and the forward swing.

2. Be sure the blade is turned square, that is turned to just past a right angle with the water.

3. Balance High. That is, make sure that the blade is sprung into the air with a lively downward flick of the hands at the finish of the stroke, and t*hat the oarsman has full control of the oar on the forward swing.*

A beginner can practise these points in a fixed tub by himself with immense benefit to his rowing.

I have gone into these points in detail in my last book, “Chats on Rowing”, but if a beginner will study them and practise them by himself it will be an immense help to his rowing. I have frequently written and said that an oarsman rows much better after ten years than after five, and much better after twenty years than after ten.

The truth is that learning the turns onto and off the feather are very difficult. They are sleight-of-hand tricks and it takes a long time to get true timing, balance, touch and control into the movements. A study and practise of these movements in a fixed tub by himself will be of enormous help to an oarsman at the beginning of his rowing career. He will find out all the finesse of getting these movements correctly and he will start by *learning to use his own initiative*.

The best example of this in my experience was Humphrey Playford [Humphrey Blake Playford, 1896-1981, Jesus College, Boat Race Winner 1920, ‘21, ’22, co-author with Freddy Brittain of “The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge”. – P.M.] At the beginning of his rowing career I took him on the Thames Tank for a fortnight going through these movements. He used to tell coaches that he had learnt how to do different points in his first fortnight. He certainly rowed the most powerful blade I have ever seen.

LATERAL PRESSURE

As, possibly, a large percentage of oarsmen have never realised, the handle of the oar moves in the arc of a circle. Many oarsmen fancy that the oar moves straight forward and straight back. With this idea, as the oar moves forward until it gets to a right angle with the rowlock, it will be easy to hold the button against the rowlock. But from that

point until fully forward, if the oarsman is thinking of the oar going straight out, it will most likely be pulled away from the rowlock. The result of this will be that the oarsman will lose all touch. If he learns the Lateral Pressure, he will feel himself held firm against the rowlock. He will remain taut and balanced and swinging like a door on a hinge. Whereas if the button loses touch with the rowlock he will become sloppy, lose all touch, harmony, rhythm, and all that taut and balanced feeling necessary for the true rowing.

So let the beginner square his blade just past the right angle with the water and hold the button pressing firmly against the rowlock, and let him watch the circular movement of the oar and keep it pressing firmly against the rowlock till right forward. As he reaches the full forward he should rise off his seat transferring his weight from the seat to the stretcher, driving his heels into the stretcher. He should at the same time be pressing the button against the rowlock as if he were trying to push the button right through the rowlock; and, just as he transfers his weight from the seat to the stretcher, so he should transfer his weight also to pressing against the rowlock, so that his weight is balanced on the stretcher and on the rowlock at the moment that he is gathered to spring his weight off the stretcher and drive it on to the rowing-pin by driving the blade into the water. Let the beginner study this till he gets the knack of balancing his weight on to the stretcher and on to the rowlock at the forward turn. Once he gets this he is complete master of the oar. With the weight thus balanced let him make sure he has got his oar fixed firmly against the rowlock with a truly squared blade and the bottom part of the oar held firmly against the rowing-pin.

He would be well advised not to do any turning of the oar at first. The turns onto and off the feather are sleight-of-hand tricks, and by trying to turn the blade square the beginner is very apt to row the blade in before the blade has been squared. The result is that the blade slices in and runs down deep and, as the oarsman pulls, the blade running down pulls the rigger down and rolls the boat. This is the main reason for the boat rolling, and if every beginner was shown how to slice his blade in and how it rolled the boat because the oar had not finished its turn, and then shown how to hold his oar truly against the rowing-pin so that it did not run down, he would soon realise that he must square the blade truly. If all did this I don’t think there would be any rolling in the boat.

So I strongly recommend no feathering at first, but rowing with the blade squared; further I would recommend the oarsman at first, whilst learning the Lateral Pressure, not to row the oar through the water at all. Let him row it back in the air pressing the button right through as he starts the forward movement. This will give him a lovely springing movement when he gets it right. Similarly, when forward, let him get this same push at the button and get the same springing movement. As he gets this springing Lateral Pressure at the finish, he should feel he is pulling himself off the seat on to the stretcher and rowlock and that he is holding the blade balanced and controlled during the swing. As I have said he should study the Lateral Pressure, especially getting that springing push round the turn at each end of the stroke and, above all things, he should feel he has a controlling hold of the oar on the forward swing. Learning to hold the oar firmly against the rowing-pin thoroughly squared throughout the stroke and thoroughly

controlled and balanced throughout the forward swing will do away with any tendency to roll the boat and will give him the whole arc of control and balance of the oar.

So let the beginner work this out for himself and let him study (1) the Lateral Pressure, (2) the truly Squared Blade, and (3) the Feather High. Let him practise these points first, without feathering and without rowing the blade into the water.

When he has grasped these points then let him row the blade through the water, paying every attention to holding the oar truly squared against the rowlock.

Let him make quite short easy strokes at first. This is most important. The first object in rowing is to get the movements timed correctly, and by rowing easily within himself he will get the springing hit and timing movements much quicker. The tendency of coach and oarsman is to try for as much length as possible and also to try to show conscious movements of the body. Let the beginner confine his attention to working the oar truly and well within his power, and make sure that he is not trying for length or for body-form movements. Let him try for truth of action by working for these movements we have set out. He will get truth of action in this way, and, as he times his movements and handles the oar correctly, so will he be able to get increasing length. *If he feels the work heavy let him shorten up*. Many an oarsman trying for length overreaches and so misses the timing movements and so he feels it heavy. Feeling it heavy, it is only natural that he should think it is heavy and that he is doing more work; whereas actually the exact opposite has occurred. He has overreached and so lost control of his timing movements and so, instead of being able to spring and drive the blade clean through, it sticks, the weight comes off, and he pulls it through with a series of lugs. So let him work easily within himself, trying always for that springing hit that will enable him to get that glorious feeling that he is stretched like a piece of elastic and that the blade is driving elastically through the water.

Our champion golfer, Cotton [Sir Thomas Henry Cotton, 1907-1987, won the British Open three times. – P.M.], in, I think, the beginning of his first article on golf to *The Morning Post*, said: “If you want to drive a long straight ball swing your club back as if you were swinging it back for a ten-foot putt.” He hit the nail on the head with this remark, and I think it boils down to this. Most people are apt to overreach and try to do too much, thereby they turn harmony into discord. I remember once saying to Montmorency, one of our best amateur golfers: “I am off my game.” He replied: “Shorten up your swing twenty yards.” I went out with this idea in my head and found I had perfect control over each shot. With a gutty ball I did 79, far the best and most controlled round I ever did. So I have introduced this saying since then: “If you want to get longer shorten up.”

The whole of the idea of all athletics and I think of everything in life is in the idea I am trying to convey. I think it really boils down to this: “use your own initiative,” and only by doing this will you get the spirit that underlies all games. Don’t try to show off; don’t try to do too much; be natural, easy and well within yourself and thus and only thus, will you get the true spirit of sport. Many people have written to me, saying, “Your teaching goes much deeper than teaching rowing, it applies to everything in life.”

FEATHER HIGH

This is the only way to get balanced control of the oar throughout the forward swing. When coming to the finish of the stroke the oar should be struck sharply down on to the sill of the rowlock. The harder the oar is struck down the higher the blade will flick into the air. The blade will get an upward momentum that will take all the weight off the rowlock and the oarsman will carry it forward with a balanced control and when finishing the forward swing he will find he has no difficulty in squaring the blade and rowing it into the water with a springing hit using his full power.

This is the most important point of all to understand. In most coaching the idea is to take the oar out of the water with a light hand, the thought being, the less weight used to bring the blade into the air the less I will press on my rigger. So the oarsman is coached for a light hand. So he drags the blade out of the water slowly, gives the blade no momentum or spring and the oar hangs heavily and uncontrolledly on the rowlock, the oarsman having no balanced control and consequently not being able to get a real springing beginning. Let anyone go out in a tub with an open rowlock and let him try springing the blade into the air as fast and hard as he can. I used to do this in the old fixed rowlock days and at first I was very surprised to find that the harder I sprung the blade into the air the less it drove the rowlock down. It would be a very good thing to have a couple of swivel rowlocks made with an open top and one could then practise this. He would find that the oar would spring off the sill of the rowlock instantly and the sharper he struck the firmer the rowlock would be. I used to strike down and with a pull with the inside hand I used to drive the blade vertically up over my head.

Most oarsmen are apt to think as they come forward that they must keep bringing the blade towards the water. This throws them out of control and balance, and kills their life and power. Let the oarsman practise rowing the blade in from the highest point and he will find thereby that he gets a beautiful springing hit and keeps a perfect balance.

So beginners, and *all oarsmen*, learn to balance the blade high and so learn the true movements. As I have said, the livelier the blade is flicked into the air the less it drives the rigger down. This movement, then, should be a lively flick which will be done just as the other blades are being brought out of the water, so the livelier the flick the shorter time the pressure is on the rowlock. If the crew get this flick together it will help them more than anything. So study the “Feather High” till you have really grasped it.

Having studied these movements, the oarsman can now go in for three exercises. First, let him row the blade only the first six inches of the stroke with a truly squared blade and a lively spring. Do this hard six times. The finish will be well away from the body and consequently the oarsman will learn to strike on to the balance at the finish much more quickly. Then let the oarsman row six finished only, again only about six inches through the water. Do these with truly squared blade as fast and hard as possible. Then let him row complete strokes also as hard and fast as possible. Be careful not to overreach or to feel anything heavy. The oarsman should feel for getting a lively, elastic springing hit

with an endless chain of movement. The shorter he makes the stroke at first the sooner will the true timing movement come in. It takes time to get the true rounded movement of the complete stroke and it will come quicker by keeping it short. As the true feeling comes, so the length will naturally increase. If an oarsman would have a go at these beginnings, finishes and full strokes every day in the fixed tub nothing would help his rowing more. He will thereby get truth of movement and these fast sharp strokes will help his rowing muscles. The rowing muscles want a lot of conditioning and a daily dose of these exercises will do more than anything to bring on the oarsman. He will in time rise from 0 Horse Power to 100 Horse Power, according to the truth of these movements and the amount of work he puts in to fit the muscles. I have often said an oarsman rows better after ten years than after five. But plenty of these fixed tub exercises will bring on improvement much quicker. There you have it. Study the foregoing and you have got *rowing in a nutshell*.

It would be advisable to give crews six Beginnings, Finishes and complete strokes frequently in their boats. I am asking the October IV to try them and tell me the result.

As I have said, in the foregoing lies the whole of rowing. In the finishing whip round the turn lies the chief point. Work at this and all will come. When you feel you have thrown the boat away and at the same time pulled the body into a forward float on to the stretcher [ferryman's finish] you will have got the hardest point of all and no one will be able to teach you anything.

I have dwelt on rowing the blade in from the highest point. That is not so as to do this always but merely to learn how to row the blade in truly, which will only follow from having learnt to carry the blade high on the feather feeling one is leaning on the handle and holding it balanced high and controlled right through the forward swing.

Perfect these last two points and you will love rowing.

DON'T EXAGGERATE

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

(1936)

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www.rowperfect.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

I have given full instructions in “Chats on Rowing” how to work the oar. This short book is intended to impress once more on the oarsman that he must use his own initiative and not leave it all to the coach.

The object of this book is also to try to help coaches and oarsmen to avoid all exaggerations in rowing. The coach feels he has a responsible position and is very apt to try to bring in something to help the crew. As soon as he departs from teaching the crew to use their own initiative and to concentrate on learning to work the oar to propel the boat he brings in a discord. A crew welds together only by the action of the Subjective Mind; and this acts unconsciously. The coach trying to get extra length, etc., concentrates the thought on the body and so destroys the feeling of welding together.

There are quite a number of people who have some idea that they represent real orthodoxy and who are always against my teaching. These people are doing their best to kill rowing as it is only natural that the young oarsmen should believe there is something in what they say. I doubt if they could tell one what is in their minds. When I returned to coach in 1905 the teaching had introduced what they called “Lively Recovery” which was straining the muscles and hearts of oarsmen and killing both rowing and oarsmen.

Another terrible introduction was the “Back Splash”. Trying to check the tendency for these things to creep in is what I am working for. Often a crew tells me they are going well and enjoying their rowing; then up comes a coach who tries to do a bit more and the boat goes dead and all enjoyment is lost. The whole story is: “It has all got to come from inside you, laddie.” So use your own initiative and do not rely entirely on the coach and sit waiting for him to supply the initiative.

This tendency to kill by overcoaching is not confined to English rowing. Cricket shows the same tendency. I read in a paper that the Australian cricketers when leaving England told the reporters that the coaching was doing harm to English cricket; and they added that some schools in Australia are getting similar teaching and those schools never get an international cricketer now.

This tendency to exaggerate in teaching is not rife upon the continent. A few years ago I got a lot of correspondence from different European countries, saying they were coaching on the ideas in my books. We saw the effect of this this year [1936] at Henley when Zürich won three races. I got a paper from Germany recently, saying Germany had taken to the Fairbairn style. Also a paper saying Russia was doing the same. In the past there has not been so much rowing on the continent as in England, but I think Continental rowing will keep on improving and England will have to look out.

CHAPTER 1

When the Zürich crew did so well at Henley this year, 1936, I wrote to the papers, saying I had been in correspondence with the coach of the Zürich crew for the last four years and he frequently wrote me that the Zürich crew were rowing on my methods — that is concentrating entirely on the oar to move the boat and allowing the bodies to work entirely unconsciously. I am certain that the Zürich crew owed their success to sticking to my methods and I have frequently told people that the Zürich crew are the only crew that have thoroughly grasped these methods and always stick to them. Arthur Dreyfus (the Zürich coach) frequently has said and written to me that their methods of rowing come entirely out of my book "Chats on Rowing" and he always adds, "One must read it frequently to get a thorough grasp of these methods;" that is the great point. Reading my book "Chats on Rowing" once is what I fancy a lot of oarsmen do; that is not much good — frequent reading and thinking it over is necessary; and that is why I say the Zürich crew are the only oarsmen that stick entirely to my methods, which can be summed up in two words — natural action.

About two or three years ago I had a lot of letters from Europe, saying various clubs had taken to my methods and were being much more successful, and adding that they were enjoying their rowing so much more. In consequence rowing in Europe has come on a great deal. People who cling to the idea of the old orthodox style say the Zürich crew was not rowing similarly to crews that have taken to my methods. The reason of this is that coaches cling to the old teaching, and are in the habit of trying to combine the two styles "orthodoxy" and Fairbairnism and so vary from my methods. There is no Fairbairn style. There is only the method of using the oar to propel the boat and if oarsmen would stick to this natural action they would row like the Zürich crews. But they have this "orthodoxy" drilled into them and coaches and oarsmen are always trying to get in extra length or some other point which destroys the harmony and rhythm. My books have caught on in Australia and I have read criticisms from Australian papers saying the coaches of crews working on my books frequently bring in their own ideas and so spoil the rhythm. Unconscious body action is the only way to get a true and harmonious action. Once the thought is directed to moving the body consciously it breaks the rhythm. The old coaching was entirely coaching for body-form and it is the hankering after this that brings in coaching for body-form, and that is the reason why people say that crews claiming to row on the principles I advocate do not row like the Zürich crew. I have found this happen to the Jesus crews when I have not been coaching. My health has been bad for a long time and occasionally I have not been able to go up to Cambridge to coach. When I returned to coach in 1905 Jesus soon got the Headship and from then, 1909, until 1914 they lost it only twice. [Here Steve does himself less than justice, for Jesus in fact lost the Headship of the river only once between 1909 and the Kaiser's war, as he correctly states when reverting to this theme. It is true that the college did also lose the Headship of the Lents (which must not be confused with the Headship of the River) in one other year; and it is also true that on neither of these occasions did Steve coach the College boats. – I.F.] Each of those years I was away and I found they had wandered from my teaching. The lure of the old body-form had come in. That is why I wrote to the paper saying the Zürich crew were rowing on the methods I always coach for, and so I hope to get coaches to stick to getting

crews to concentrate on working the oar. One critic wrote that the Zürich crew were not rowing on my methods, but had followed Tom Sullivan's [Thomas Sullivan, 1868-1949, New Zealand amateur and professional sculling champion who coached the Berliner Ruder-Club during the 1930s. – P.M.] teaching. Arthur Dreyfus wrote me that was untrue and added Sullivan would be the first to say the Zürich crew were not rowing according to his teaching.

As I have said, many clubs on the continent have written me that they have taken to rowing on my books and they have got my permission to translate all or some of my books into German, French, Italian, and a fourth language, I think Dutch. Recently I got a leading German paper saying Germany was adopting the methods I advocate, and another paper saying the Russian Soviets were doing the same. I fancy in a few years it will be found that the continental crews are better than the English crews, the reason being they have not the fetish of the old so-called "orthodox" (I call it awfuldox) style to hamper them.

The two most powerful Etonian oarsmen I ever saw, Muttlebury and Guy Nickalls, rowed with exactly the same movements as my crews come to. I frequently heard remarks from the upholders of orthodoxy which were to the effect that they would have been wonderful oars if they had rowed in "style". Surely the oarsmen who are indexing on their blades the most powerful work are rowing truest. Arthur Dreyfus and I have the same objection to the word "style". Many a would-be oarsman thinks: "I am rowing in style; so and so has coached me;" and thinks "my style will make the boat go." So he does no thinking and does not work. He merely worships that Golden Calf called orthodoxy and loses all initiative.

There is an attempt amongst these Golden Calf worshippers to say English rowing to-day is not as good as it was. One of the correspondents who contradicted my letter saying the Zürich crew rowed on my methods wrote about rowing in the old days. He is about 25 years old so he would not know much about Hanlan [Edward "Ned" Hanlan, 1855-1908, World Champion single sculler 1880-84, considered to be the first individual in history to take full advantage of the sliding seat. – P.M.], Beach, Gulston, [Frank] Playford, Hastie, Hockin, etc. He also said I was boastful. In a way that has troubled me. I talk of my methods and the "Fairbairn" style. This is not from egotism; I have frequently pointed out that I have not invented a style and my methods only mean the methods I have adopted. I use these terms to refute criticism when one cannot go into long explanations. I can say I have been instrumental in getting rid of fixed seats and fixed rowlocks and I am always trying to get rid of the fixed ideas of the Golden Calf Brigade.

My one ambition is to be like Shakespeare who never used the ego and I have only used the above expressions without any ego in them, merely with the wish that what is called the "Fairbairn" style will get oarsmen to concentrate on working the blades to move the boat, and to allow the bodies to work unconsciously. All my coaching is to make oarsmen realise that "it has got to come from inside you, laddies." The best of all coaches, Reeve made this his key note. [See "Blackwood's Magazine", No. 1606, August 1949, pp. 118-124 – I.F.] The Golden Calf Brigade are now trying to apologise for the victories of Zürich and America at Henley this year by saying English rowing has gone off. This is not true; English rowing was never so good or so popular as it is to-day. The fact is that

European rowing has come on very much because the Europeans are working to concentrate on working the oar to move the boat; and I think this is at least partly due to the fact that they have read books on rowing written by, shall I say, Shakespeare. The Jesus crew at Henley this year put their autographs in some books written by this author. These books belonged to the Japanese crew.

CHAPTER 2

The argument about “styles” is no new one. When I went to Cambridge in the year 1881, the Jesus men told me that they had got Joe Sadler, the Champion professional sculler, to coach them and he taught them to concentrate on working the oar to move the boat. Sir Frederick Jackson, who rowed for Jesus at that period, told me that Sadler would stick a piece of paper on the oar where it meets the blade and say “Don’t wet that!” That threw the oarsman’s thought on to the way not to wet the paper. Not to wet the paper, the oarsman would have to confine his thought to moving the blade so as not to wet the paper. It taught the oarsman to use his initiative to row the blade correctly. To do this he had to turn the blade square, as it is called. Really the blade should be turned rather more than square, that is, to rather past a right angle with the water; and then when it is rowed into the water with a springing hit it strikes the water in such a way that the tendency of the stroke is to lift the boat out of the water. Further, “don’t wet that” means the oar has to be controlled throughout the stroke. For the oarsman to carry out this instruction, he has to make sure that he squares the blade and connects the back part of the oar truly with the rowing-pin and holds it connected throughout the stroke. To do this he should concentrate on the lower part of the oar that is against the rowing-pin, and make sure that he flicks this part of the oar firmly against the rowing-pin, and holds it there till it comes to the point where the feather starts. “Don’t wet that” will force the oarsman to get this correct manipulation of the oar and will throw the whole of the initiative on to the oarsman.

That is the most important point in coaching — getting the oarsman to use his own initiative to work his oar. If he will realise this point he will take charge of his rowing and learn to row much more quickly and much more enjoyably and much more truly than if he is driven under the method of the old “orthodox” teaching to hold and move his body in certain positions. So in the early 70’s Joe Sadler coached the Jesus crews to learn to work their oars and concentrate on the blade-work. Under this coaching, which was a great departure from the orthodox teaching, the Jesus crews were very successful. They won the Ladies’ Plate five times. They won the Grand and Stewards’ in 1879 and scratched for the final of the Ladies’ and Visitors’. The Jesus men told me that W.B. Woodgate, a very great judge of rowing, wrote that the Jesus crews would have won the Boatrace for the last ten years if they had not been hampered by oarsmen from the other colleges. Jesus went Head of the River in 1875 and stayed there for 11 years — another record due to rowing to work the oars instead of being forced by the coach to hold and move their bodies in certain positions. The Jesus men told me that for each of the three years previous to my arrival a Jesus man had been secretary of the C.U.B.C., the President coming from another college. They told me that the President picked all the ‘stylish’ looking oarsmen for his crew and gave the Secretary all the round-backed rough-looking men. The Secretary’s crew won each of those years and feeling from arguments on “style” ran so high between the Presidents and the Secretaries these three years that they were not on speaking terms with each other; so argument on rowing styles is no new thing.

I took charge of the Jesus boat when I got into it my first May term. It consisted of the Captain and seven freshmen when we started. Before our first outing I told the crew to concentrate on working their oars to move the boat. The captain [Arthur Middleton Hutchinson. – P.M.] had got a coach on the bank. It was only recently that that Captain told me that I said to the coach when we were starting on the homeward journey, "Do you mind not talking to the crew, your talking is upsetting their rowing." He was coaching for body-form and so taking their thoughts off working the oars. I do not remember saying this. Anyway I took the crew off to Ely next day and had no one on the bank. I spoke to the crew myself from the boat. We got in two older men shortly before the races and stayed Head with five Freshmen in the boat, four of whom had never rowed before that year. This was considered a great feat and, when I offered to coach again on my return to England eighteen years afterwards, the Jesus dons quoted it as a great feat. We used to row the boat to Ely on Monday and back on Saturday and had long outings at Ely. So I started with my two maxims "get the crew to concentrate on working the oars" and "Mileage makes Champions."

Besides having broken away from the 'Varsity style I lengthened the slides in the Jesus boat from 8 inches to 14 inches; this produced another outcry from the old Brigade. They said that this killed swing and brought in muscular action. It brought in moving the whole body's weight six inches further and so the shoulder movement would really be longer than with the short slide, and there would be a much longer weight movement of the whole body. The outcry was the same as always and showed great ignorance and a conceit that they were the only people that knew anything about rowing. They said it might do over a short course but would be no good over a long one. I tested this and found the last half of a long course with long slides compared more than favourably with the times made by short slides. That was my first alteration in the boats. The outcry was surprising as London and Thames were using long slides and were very successful at Henley. Long slides and swivel rowlocks were introduced by Hanlan who proved their value by beating all his opponents easily.

The Golden Calf Brigade were very strong against my lengthening the slide. One wrote to *The Field* as follows: "owing to the ill-advised action of Jesus lengthening their slides they will go down from Head." The outcry was similar to the cry that goes up from these unfortunate people whenever my crews are successful. Considering Hanlan had beaten the world's best scullers after he introduced long slides and swivels and that Thames and London too had taken to long slides and were most successful at Henley surely there was some reason in it. The outcry was that it would spoil the swing. Swing is moving shoulders and long slides is moving all the body. So the whole body moved six inches further by the slide being 14 inches instead of 8; and no doubt besides moving the whole body the shoulders reached a further distance. Alas! the Golden Calf Brigade have fixed ideas.

Another alteration I made was putting the fifth arm on the rigger; I buckled my own rigger several times and so I put on the fifth arm. I found this gave greater solidity, so I put a fifth arm on all the riggers. Later on I centre-seated the boats, a move eventually followed by all the English rowing world. This made balance and stability easier. Then I

brought in the swivel rowlock. Again came the outcry. The swivel is universal outside England and in England only Oxford and Leander use fixed pins.

Continuing on these lines Jesus won the Grand in 1885 with their May Boat — the only May Boat that ever won it. Next year Oxford and Cambridge put on long slides and broke the existing records over every part of the home courses and also the Putney record. What became of all the outcries? This swung the coaching round and in ’86 and ’87 crews concentrating on working the oars won the whole of the Henley Regatta and all but one had been through my hands. That crew was London’s Second eight, which won the Thames Cup. Thames and London crews never in those days rowed anything like the ‘Varsity style. They rowed much like crews I coach. They rowed just like the Melbourne Rowing Club when my eldest brother [George] stroked them.

After my eldest brother had started rowing with Melbourne, three blues came to Australia from Oxford and Cambridge [third Fairbairn brother Charlie, H.P. Marriott, and Norman Armytage. See “Fairbairn of Jesus”. – P.M.] and I heard these blues arguing for the ‘Varsity style. My brother said: “You will find this style better when you get into it.” There were Melbourne, London and Thames rowing very successfully with a natural action and no artificial “orthodox” teaching. So in ’85, ’86, ’87 Cambridge College crews won the Grand and in ’88 and ’89 Thames won the Grand. I had rowed with Thames in ’86 and ’87; and when I returned to England for a year in 1897 the two captains of ’88 and ’89 wrote me welcoming my return and both added, “we owed all our successes to you,” very much as Arthur Dreyfus writes to me now.

I had one very pleasant reception during those days. When I took my degree the room was packed and when I went up to take my degree hundreds of voices imitated the Jesus cock crowing. Later on I heard that the London papers that evening said it was the most popular degree since Lord Byron had taken his. This popularity was due to my having coached many colleges on my lines. I used to spend the whole day on the river coaching. Once I took a crew over the course at 9 o’clock, another at 10, then Third Trinity to Clayhythe from 11-2; then at 3, 4, 5 and 6 I took crews over courses; and then I rowed the long course and we broke the then record. Thirty-six miles in the saddle in a day. Third Trinity did a Clayhythe once in training each year for two or three years. They used to say to me “Come and give us our annual sweat.”

CHAPTER 3

I returned from Australia early this century, and I frequently heard doctors and other people saying rowing was bad for the heart. I was astonished at this and went up to Cambridge to look at the rowing. I then understood what an old Cambridge blue told me when he returned to Australia from a visit to England. He said: “I saw the Cambridge rowing and I cried; then I saw the Oxford rowing and I laughed.” It was not rowing; a death-dealing movement called Lively Recovery was being taught and was killing both oarsmen and rowing. The idea was to try to get a longer swing and the coaching was “Swing your body right down whilst you hold the knees flat.” It was a very fast jerked movement and strained the abdominal muscles of a great many men; it also strained many hearts. To kill this movement I returned to coaching. After a time Jesus men were coaching twelve other colleges and the jerky lively recovery disappeared and a more harmonious movement returned. A masseur told me he used to have to massage and strap up the abdominal muscles of 60 men every term and he added “Now Jesus men are coaching so many Colleges, I have not one.”

This lively recovery had made the rowing very bad and my crews made a bump practically every bumping race for several years; Jesus oarsmen had two or four or six oars hanging up according to their years of residence. A Jesus Captain added up the number of oars Jesus crews had got during this period and found over fifty crews had got them.

The strange thing to my mind was that every coach coached for this lively recovery and not a single one saw the error of the movement. The fast jerked swing gave apparent length and pace to the swing but it was not real length, it was a terrible discord. A fast jerky movement will always catch the eye and look long and lively but it is a deception. The truth is that the more smooth and even the body movement is the less it will be noticed, but the longer it will be and the shorter it will look. Hence the Old Brigade say my crews are short. The length the blade moves indexes the length the body’s weight has moved the oar; and a compact short looking crew will show a longer blade propulsion than a crew that looks to have a long lively but jerky swing. I have always said the nearer an oarsman gets to perfection the less will his movement be apparent and that a perfect oarsman’s movement would be invisible. This is the most important thing to realise in coaching and in rowing. This deceptive look of lively long swing is what is very apt to deceive the coach and crew and so the coach goes for it. That is what I am always trying to stop: coaches going for exaggerations. How often have we read recently in the papers “Oxford were swinging longer today”? I always think then: “Yes, they are swinging longer and so going slower.” The crew endeavouring to swing longer does not come on to the stretcher gathered like a compressed spring ready to strike with full power; they have turned harmony into discord and can only produce a sprawling lug. It makes the work heavier because the timing is broken, but many an oarsman thinks he must be doing more work because it feels heavier. Oarsmen concentrating on learning to work the oar to propel the boat gradually get a truer timing movement. They get gathered compression on the stretcher, a true catch and draw through the water, and a true elastic throw away of the boat; and the last pull whips the

oar round the turn and starts the forward swing. Every movement is reversed at this instant and the body is pulled forward with just the same movement that one makes on getting out of a chair.

All my coaching is merely an endeavour to get oarsmen to use their own initiative and to think for themselves. Now, oarsmen, think how you get out of a chair! There must be an initial movement of getting the body to move forward, possibly got by a pull of the hands against the arms of the chair. That pull would, so to speak, throw the chair away backwards; and so the final whip round the turn throws the boat away and starts the body forward, that forward movement being used to propel the boat. Think this out! Just as the oarsmen comes forward to spring off the stretcher, so should a man sitting in a chair get out of it on to his feet in a position as if he were going to spring back over the chair, if he wants to make exactly the same movement that an oarsman makes. Coach and oarsman think the foregoing over till you grasp it thoroughly! Once you grasp it you will work for compact movements full of power and never go in for exaggerations of length, etc.

As I have said, how often do we read “Oxford improved today, they had more length”? Cannot you see the reporter saying good-bye to the coach and congratulating him on this improvement? Both go away satisfied, little thinking Oxford were more showy but it was harder and more tiring and slower work.

To come back to my coaching Jesus, they were a small boat club when I began again and the rowing was very bad. I began in 1905 and they won the Ladies’ in 1908 in five seconds faster time than the final of the Grand won by Christ Church, who had beaten Jesus in a heat. Jesus went Head of the Mays in 1909 and stayed Head until the 1914 war except for 1911, in which year I was not coaching. On my return the next year I found they had gone in for exaggerations and lost all idea of a compact gathered spring-like action.

1908 Jesus Eight, winner of the Ladies' Plate.
Steve and Hutch are in dark jackets.

The greatest success was the Jesus second boat. I used to send them ahead of the fast boat and let the fast boat keep chasing them; and I used to race them up the Long Reach with the first boat giving the second the inside station. Two of my maxims are contained in this. The first is: "You will never learn to race by rowing, you will only learn to row by racing;" and the second is: "The best coach is the bows of a faster boat chasing a crew." It concentrates the crew on using their initiative in trying to move their boat faster. I got this in the 80's from a professional sculler going out with a pupil. He would put the bows of his boat behind the other boat and keep driving him along, making him use his own initiative to propel his boat. With this treatment the Jesus second boat got up to fourth and fifth in the Lents and Mays respectively and stayed there for years — a very much greater performance than the second boat of any other College has done whilst I have been coaching. These second boats bumped the first boat of every other college except First Trinity; and as the Jesus first boat was Head most of the time till the war it showed how much better was the coaching than the old orthodox teaching of other Cambridge colleges. During this period Jesus first boats had met and beaten the Oxford Head of the River boat at Henley three times. So it showed Jesus teaching was better than Oxford teaching also. Jesus did not get much rowing

material. I never had a Jesus crew averaging 12 stone, and the second boat would be much lighter.

The more successful my crews were, the more bitterly did the old Brigade abuse my coaching. My crews were short, they said; it might do for a short course but was no good for the 'Varsity Boat; it was a style in which a bad crew might beat a worse crew; and a great many more arguments of that sort. Of course they all were apologies for my methods beating their coaching. I looked up the number of Blues Jesus had got during my coaching and found Jesus had got more Blues than any other college except Trinity. Trinity had over 1,000 undergraduates to the 79 at Jesus when I began coaching. [On page 275 of "The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge", by Freddie Brittain and Humphrey Blake Playford, it is stated that the figures were 124 for Jesus, 671 for Trinity in 1905. — I. F.] Their success on the river soon attracted more and at one time the Tutor told me that he was refusing two men a day as they had not room for them.

As I have said there were many outcries against my coaching, all really because my crews from a small college were so successful thereby showing that the teaching of the other colleges was bad; and the coaches having no case started to abuse the attorney for the other side.

I will give one example: A leading orthodox authority wrote in the paper that a certain English crew showed the true orthodox style. I wrote to him and said: "Six men of that crew have been rowing in the Oxford boat, so that crew has practically been rowing together from January to July and they are the heaviest crew we have had at Henley. So what are you going to say to-morrow when this crew rowing in true orthodox style, a crew with the longest practise and the heaviest crew, gets beaten by the Belgians?" The Jesus College dean was sitting beside him watching the Belgians beat this crew and he said to the Jesus dean: "Steve Fairbairn is ruining English rowing." But alas! I have not quite done that yet. Still I hope someday "English rowing" will be rowing. It will be the best day for rowing in England.

One criticism of my teaching was that my crews rowed more like the Belgians, the Australians and the Americans. [Winners of the Grand Challenge Cup, Belgium in 1906, 1907 and 1909; Australia in 1912; America in 1914. – P.M.]. Still the criticism of my crews rowing like them was meant to be derogatory to my crews.

CHAPTER 4

After the war I coached the Thames Rowing Club. They won the principal races at all the upriver Regattas; their second boat won the Thames Cup events and at Molesey their second crew won the Grand beating the first crews of the other Clubs, again proving the value of working the second crew with the first boat. I then coached London and they soon after won the Grand at Henley three times. (Thames also won the Grand three times in the 1920's. Their previous win was in 1889; the then Captain wrote me that was due to my previous coaching). London's previous win was forty years back. The Metropolitan rowing before I coached Thames had become worse than the rowing at the 'Varsities.

In 1923, when Thames won the Grand with a crew very much lighter [11 st. 9¼ lbs.] and of less rowing experience than the other Grand crews, once more the cry arose: "This will throw back English rowing ten years." Surely a crew with much less rowing experience and less physique winning could only show a better rowing style.

One Easter vacation I coached a Jesus College Oxford crew. The Oxford papers condemned their style in no measured terms, but they went up six places; another example of the wrong idea of style that was in the minds of the reporters. The Captain of that crew afterwards coached Oriel. They went up 20 places and rowed Head three times in twenty-four consecutive races. They have rowed Head twelve consecutive times since.

Soon after the war Selwyn took to my methods and I coached them. Selwyn is a small college and it has worked up to third on the river in the Lent and May races. Pembroke then followed my methods and Jesus, Pembroke and Selwyn have been the first three crews at the Head of the Lent and May Races for several years, Head of the River at Oxford and the three first places at Cambridge; what is the matter with the orthodox rowing? But still the cry goes on. The Zürich crew took to rowing on my books; and as they frequently wrote me that they were concentrating entirely on my method of working the oar to propel the boat and allowing the body to work unconsciously, after the great success of this club at Henley this year I wrote to *The Times* that they were rowing on my methods. This produced a lot of denials by the Old Brigade. Arthur Dreyfus, their coach, wrote and said my remark was true. My object was to get crews to try these methods. Many have for some time, but some still cling to the old body-form ways. Recently a series of lectures on rowing style was given. The first lecturer, a very fine oarsman, said he divided rowing into three styles: orthodoxy, opportunism and the Steve style. He said he upheld orthodoxy but found he rowed with a moving slide and a rounded back so he called himself an opportunist. These two points being the two points where my crews varied from orthodoxy, I got up and said the speaker had practically agreed with my ideas. At this point I was interrupted by several people who coached on my methods saying he had not agreed so I left it at that. He had put in opportunism which was practically the Steve style. But arguing on styles is useless; let any coach and crew stick to learning to work the oars to move the boat and letting the body work unconsciously. If they do this honestly for a week they will never go in for

exaggerations. But alas! they are always wanting to get someone to coach them and get that “bit more”. Once again the true story is: “It has all got to come from inside you, laddie.” So trust yourself to find out how to work the oar.

One of the arguments against my crews has been that they have never done anything really wonderful. Well last year, 1935, Jesus bumped Pembroke who won the Grand a few weeks afterwards. That Jesus crew weighed barely 11 stone and rarely had a coach with them. I used to sit on the bank and watch them go by. They knew my coaching was only telling them to learn to work the oar. Formerly when I could bicycle with crews I used to coach them Monday and Tuesday, and Friday and Saturday and leave them alone on Wednesday and Thursday. Other people used to say to me: “You never say anything.” I used to reply: “No, I don’t; but they know I am watching their blades work and so they concentrate on working them;” and I added: “I am stopping another coach saying too much.”

There, briefly, is the history of “styles” in rowing. My book “Chats on Rowing” explains how to work the oar. In 1935 and 1936 Jesus were very successful after “Chats” came out. So again read “Chats” frequently and grasp its ideas; and you will learn to work your oar and you *won’t* exaggerate.

THE ENDLESS CHAIN MOVEMENT

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

(1937)

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www.rowperfect.co.uk

This is believed to be the last thing Steve wrote on rowing. He wrote it in 1937, the year before he died. — I. F.

INTRODUCTION

The difficulty about learning to row is lack of concentration. The young oarsman gets into a boat and starts to row, but for some reason or other his concentration seems to go. I have stated in my books on rowing that it is necessary to concentrate on learning to work the oar to move the boat, and that can only be done by continuously concentrating on working the oar and feeling what the blade is doing in the water to propel the boat. To try and make this concentration easier to the oarsman, I am going to try and give him the idea of the oarsman's movements in what I call the Endless Chain, Spinning Wheel Movement. If the oarsman can grasp this, I think it will make rowing pleasanter and more successful. But, as Arthur Dreyfus, the Zürich coach of that wonderfully successful crew of 1936 at Henley, says, it is necessary to read "Chats on Rowing" frequently. That is my last book, and similarly let the would-be oarsman *study this Endless Chain Movement in these notes* FREQUENTLY.

THE ENDLESS CHAIN MOVEMENT

The whole of the movement of a stroke is an Endless Chain, Spinning Wheel Movement. To get the idea, imagine yourself sitting in an armchair. Next imagine you want to get out and jump over the back of the chair. If you notice how you get out, you will see that you give a draw with your hands that pulls the body on to its feet. This pull acts in exactly the same way as the “Throw her Away” acts at the finish of the stroke in a boat. This pull allows the body to leave the chair with practically no other effort and allows the body to float forward on to its feet gathered to spring over the back of the chair, if sitting in a chair or if sitting in a boat, it allows the body to float forward at perfect rest, and to gather on the stretcher ready to spring off it, and so to generate a momentum that — when communicated to the blade by a firm elastic draw at it — drives the blade into the water and so starts to pull the boat along by the hands pulling this moving weight on to the rowing-pin. This pull lifts the weight of the body off the seat and by sustaining this pull throughout the stroke the weight is kept off the seat and is on THE BLADE, THE STRETCHER and THE ROWLOCK. *So the forward swing* is an easy float generated by the “Throw her Away” draw at the oar at the finish of the stroke. The weight is kept continuously on the blade, the rowing-pin and the stretcher by a continuous elastic draw at the oar throughout the stroke, the hands drawing the oar into the body and the feet driving at the stretcher until the oar is getting very near the body when the whole movement is altered. As the oar is started to be rowed out of the water, the feet give up pressing on the stretcher and the handle of the oar is being rowed down and rowing the blade into the air with an upward rounded movement. At this point the throw her away and pull the body forward comes in, and the blade is turned from square against the rowlock to the flat feathered position. This turn from throw her away and pull the body into a forward float and swing the oar from balanced against the rowing-pin to being balanced on the sill with a sweeping rounded movement of the oar is the movement that constitutes the Endless Chain, Spinning Wheel Movement. It is all done in a flash — the change from throw her away to float forward — and requires perfection in Timing which will only come by learning to work the oar correctly and by allowing the body to work entirely unconsciously. In the old coaching the first point was, do not use your arms, also keep your arms straight. The idea was any pull with the arms would tire them. By holding the arms straight and thinking of not using them, one did not get half, if any, of that elastic pull which gives a true elasticity to the stroke. When I began to experiment about whether using the arms would tire them, I soon found that trying to use the arms by pulling as hard as possible with them, only passed the boat away with a beautiful gliding movement. *This was because the weight was held on to the finish*. Whereas, in the old way of not continuously drawing at the oar and so drawing it into the body from the start, when the oarsman towards the finish started to bend his arms and let the oar come into the body, he let the work off, and let the moving boat bring the oar home. The fear that pulling at the oar and bending the arms would tire the arms is all wrong. As one pulls at the oar and draws it into the body he does not use any arm muscles but he uses the muscles down the back, so the arms do not tire. The oar has to be drawn into the body and this should be continuous. One cannot get the true Endless Chain Movement without starting at the beginning of the stroke to draw the oar evenly, elastically and continuously into the body. It does not follow that the arms need bend at

once because the shoulders reach forward a good way and they can be drawn back at once. But the elbows should never be locked to hold the arms straight. They should always be kept elastically alive, and the hands drawing at their hardest. There should be no conscious thought about the movement of the arms. All should be left to unconscious natural action. Reverting to getting out of a chair. As one pulls at the arms of the chair, one feels the body floating forward and one feels a final throw her away at the arms of the chair which if the chair were on wheels would throw the chair away. When one is walking, just before one foot leaves the ground there is a very similar movement with the foot to the throw her away movement with the oar. In fact, in all body movements at any game there are very similar movements. When one is vaulting with a pole, there is the initial run which generates momentum like rowing the blade in. Then as the pole is driven into the ground similar to the blade being rowed into the water there comes the spring off the ground similar to the spring off the stretcher. Then comes the draw with the arms that draw the body up and over the bar similar to the draw at the oar. Then as the body is clearing the bar there is the throw away of the pole which throws the pole back and allows the body to float down on to the ground again, just as the throw her away at the finish of the stroke allows the body to float forward on to the stretcher again.

Once more let the oarsman imagine he is getting out of a chair to gather on his feet and spring back. Now further let him imagine that he is also coming forward to grasp an oar that is fixed forward with the back of the oar placed firmly against the rowing-pin with the blade turned over just past the right angle and with the blade fixed in the air about six inches above the water so that he can generate enough momentum as he drives the blade into the water to carry the blade right through the stroke as he pulls at it elastically and sustains that elastic pull right through the stroke. As he comes floating forward to grasp his oar he must spring back off the stretcher and pull at his oar. *This pull* lifts his weight off *the seat* on to *the blade*, and on to *the rowing-pin*, and he should feel himself leaning all his weight on the rowing-pin. One of my calls to a crew is: “Easy and lazy lean her along.” Now if the oarsman grasps this idea thoroughly he will soon learn to draw all his weight off the seat and to draw this weight on to the rowing-pin and so use all his weight right through the stroke to draw the boat along. The act of rowing may be summed up in two words — *Spring and Draw*. I doubt if one oarsman in a thousand has this idea of Spring and Draw when he commences to row. If he once gets this idea then no body-form coaching from the bank will come into his rowing. He will naturally reach to his full powerful length and make all his movements to his strong point and make all his movements rounded and true. Whereas if the coach starts, as so many do, telling him to swing further, he will swing beyond the point from which he can most effectively use his weight. Coaching an oarsman consciously to swing his body as far as he can will bring in quite a different action. Instead of getting a throw her away and a consequent float forward he will think consciously of swinging his body. To do this he will not get a hard finish and he will stop working before the finish. He will bring in his muscles consciously to move his body sitting heavily on the seat at the finish and throughout the forward swing. Also he will not gather truly on the stretcher compressed and ready to spring. Once the oarsman gets the true idea of the rounded Endless Chain, Spinning Wheel Movement he will float out to his strong point and gather to spring and draw from there. His strong point will not be his longest forward point at first

but as he goes on with his spring and draw his muscles will improve and he will find his strong point becomes a longer point. But if he tries to swing out to his longest forward reach, he will find it very heavy and dead work to row. The oarsman should realise that if he gets the spring and draw truly timed from his strong point he will not get any heavy dragging feeling. Once he feels it heavy he has over-reached, the blade will not come through and he does not row his blade nearly as far through the water as when he rows to his strong point. So though he does not try to swing so far he applies his weight to drive the blade further and with much more ease, so we get another of my sayings: "*If you want to get longer*, shorten up." What happens when over-reaching makes the stroke feel heavy is *the weight does not keep driving. The weight comes off the momentum is lost*, and *the stroke is heavy and dead*. I always illustrate this by saying if one wants to break a door open, he will not do so by putting his shoulder against the door and pushing, but if he draws his should away from the door and strikes it with a hit, he will burst the door open, and the body will go flying through. There will be no feeling of effort. The feeling is just similar when rowing the blade in from the strong point. The blade will travel through fast and far and there will be no feeling of heaviness or lugging; but a glorious feeling of elasticity, life and ease.

The blade moving through the water is an index of the oarsman's work. The oarsman should endeavour to make it cut evenly through the water as fast and as far as he can. The blade should make contact with the water with a true harmonious sound called the BELL NOTE. It should then cut evenly and continuously through the water, as it moves through the water it is pushing a weight of waterway and the reaction of the pushed water pushing against the blade is what propels the boat. So the faster and the farther the blade travels through the water, the faster and farther the boat is propelled. Further, if the blade is driving truly, continuously and elastically through the water, as the blade is rowed out of the water the water will come up behind it as if boiling. So let the oarsman work for a true bell note, a long, fast and even movement of the blade through the water, and for the water to come up boiling as the blade is rowed out. This boiling water is the hall mark of the true stroke. The oarsman should look at his blade and see it working, and work for these points. Then he should shut his eyes and feel his blade cutting through the water. Once he can sense the feeling of the blade working, he has the foundation laid truly; and watching the blade working and then shutting the eyes, and feeling it working is the best way to open the eyes to rowing truly.

To get the oar to work truly, it must be struck on to the balance at the finish with a rounded swinging movement, and struck from the balance into the water with a similar rounded movement. One should always be conscious of the blade and should feel it is always leading. To get this feeling, he will feel that his hands are drawing the oar in towards the body and whipping it round the turn and striking the blade into the air and feeling the blade in his hands, so to speak. This transfers the oar from pulling against the rowing-pin to being balanced on the sill of the rowlock; and as I have said the oarsman should feel the blade balanced in his hands, he should feel it spring into the air and he should feel it leading and so he will be in possession of his oar and feel it spinning forward and so he will get a true spinning wheel movement. Many oarsmen, in fact probably all, as they begin to row will feel that as they are coming forward, they

should gradually bring the oar nearer the water in order to be sure of getting it into the water. Similarly, many oarsmen will feel that as they are going to get the blade out of the water they must take the oar out of the water as gingerly as possible. These points are very much coached for and are very wrong. As the oarsman goes to take the blade out of the water, he should keep rowing firmly and true against the rowing-pin and so row the oar right home with the full weight of the body propelling the boat. Then, in a flash, as he swings the oar round the turn he should strike the handle down with a really sharp downward movement that springs the blade into the air and gives it an upward momentum so that it swings forward with practically no weight on the rowlock. The oarsman should also feel he is holding the oar truly balanced by feeling he is leaning on the oar as he floats forward. This sharp strike of the blade into the air at the finish allows the oarsman to keep propelling to the finish and then in a flash with a downward strike the blade is sprung into the air. The idea of getting the oar out with a light gingerly movement means first of all letting off the work before the finish; and then trying to hold it lightly on the feather means that he loses his controlling hold and there being no strike and upward momentum the oar hangs heavily on the sill. In the old days, I used to take oarsmen in a fixed tub and show them how the sharper and harder one struck on to the balance the less it depressed the rowlock. There were no strings on the fixed rowlocks and with a little pull with the hands as I struck on to the balance I drove the blade up vertically right above my head. Learning this strike on to the balance is the most important point in rowing. A coach cannot do better than take a pair of beginners in a tub and illustrate how the sharper he strikes on to the balance, the firmer the rowlock feels and so he gets confidence to get this true strike which allows him to row his hardest right to the finish and then to get the blade balanced in the air with a momentum that gives him control and balance on the forward swing. This quick strike on to the balance is very much like the surgeon who takes the plaster off a wound with a quick flick instead of drawing it off slowly and gingerly. Having got this strike truly one can swing the oar forward holding it high and firmly away from the water till right forward. Now the exercise I would advise the beginner to take is to try and row his blade into the water from as high as he can. This will teach him he has got to raise the hands before being right forward and he will learn how to grip the water with a truly balanced body and blade that will give a true strike from the balance. These two points, striking on to the feather and striking from the feather, are the two most important points to learn and the learner will discover that the harder he strikes the blade into the air the less it disturbs the boat and the higher he holds the blade and rows it into the water from the start, the quicker will he learn to get a true beginning. The finest Sculler I ever saw, Bill Beach, who won the Professional Sculling Championship seven times, used to swing his sculls very high in the air showing the blades were leading and the balance was true. The stroke of the Thames 1923 Crew [Ian Fairbairn. – P.M.] had this same high swing of the oar that gave that momentum which is the foundation of watermanship, got by the high swing being the result of perfect balance. That stroke was finishing a three mile row, and one of the people on the launch said, “Look at Stroke’s blade! It is not visible for the first five feet as it leaves the water.” We looked and sure enough the blade was travelling faster than the human eye could visualise it. All the result of holding the weight on to the finish and then striking on to the feather with that flick that springs the oar high into the air and carries it forward full of momentum leading the oarsman and ready to

strike from the balance into the water. The only way an oarsman can get a true balance is by this strike of the blade into the air at the finish. No dawdling or nervous movement, just a rounded strike down at the finish as if one were trying to smash the oar on the sill. This lightning movement will be instantaneous and is the quickest and lightest way he can bring his blade on to the feather.

Now as to finish, let the oarsman try how high he can row his blade into the water and row. As he holds it higher and higher at the moment of rowing it into the water he will find he has more and more control over his oar, and this is the best and only way to learn that balanced control which allows the oarsman to gather on the stretcher and spring his full weight on to the oar.

So we get the foundation of the Endless Chain Movement; the foundation of watermanship, and the foundation of balance and control and handling your oar correctly are all got by learning to balance high and by striking on to and from the feather truly.

OBITUARY

STEVE

25 August 1862 – 16 May 1938

The details of Steve Fairbairn's career as oarsman and coach are too well known to need repetition here, and any assessment of the past or future value of the Fairbairn Style must be left to others. Whatever verdict posterity pronounces on the style will also be its verdict on the man, for the two were inseparable. The style, in fact, was the man. It was the perfect expression of his character, being simple, natural, unpolished, energetic, and strongly individualistic. It was the expression of a personality so overwhelming as to make itself felt, even in distant parts of the world, on men who had never seen him. Some of those who came under his spell at second hand did so through the medium of men who had been his pupils at Cambridge or elsewhere. Others came under it through the medium of his vast output of letters, or through his published works. In these, as in no other books on rowing, the author's personality was stamped in every line – stamped, too, in such a vivid way that readers who had never seen him were brought, as it were, into personal contact with him.

The effect of his personality on his immediate pupils was almost magical, and his mere presence among them was more than once responsible for turning defeat into victory. One of his crews, after rowing over for three days in the May Races, attributed their bump on the fourth day to his skill in detecting a defect in the oars which they had been using, and to his suggestion that they should row with different oars in the last race. It is

nevertheless probable that if he had ordered, not a change of oars, but a change of socks, they would have made their bump just the same.

It is not surprising that Steve Fairbairn held a unique position in the rowing world, for rowing was his one subject, and his enthusiasm for it knew no bounds. What is more, he possessed a most remarkable gift for communicating his enthusiasm to others; and, when once a man had caught the infection, he found in Steve a master who had a genius for teaching, a teacher whose lessons had something fresh in them every day, a teacher, moreover, who was always willing, even eager, to learn something from the meanest oarsman in the club. Many an unskilled freshman was astonished and embarrassed when some chance remark of his, or some lucky stroke in a fixed tub was seized upon by Steve and made the subject of his next lecture to the first boat.

Individualist though he was, and the strongest possible encourager of individualism in his Crews, he nevertheless exercised an iron discipline over them. They all had to submit to the master mind. The worst crime that a man could commit in his eyes, next to referring to rowing with the slightest approach to levity, was to rebel against his authority; and submitting to his authority meant submitting to an amount of hard work such as no other crews had to endure. During the period when he lived in Cambridge for most of the term, he went to Town one day in each fortnight to attend a board meeting of Dalgety and Co. [a London trading company engaged in, among other things, wool brokering. – P.M.], but he left a full ration of work to be done in his absence. One Dalgety Day – his crews always called it that – he returned from Town at an unusually early hour, and found the boat-house deserted. We believe that this was the first and last Dalgety Day on which the full ration of work was not done.

The time of day which Steve loved most was when he had his crews afloat. He enjoyed every minute of the outing – “Every good outing is a joy, and every good stroke rowed is a joy in itself.” – and he wanted his crews to enjoy it too. As soon as his boat took the water, he ceased to be a rowing coach and became a general. His crews were no longer a mere collection of rowing men, but a solid phalanx, its units knit closely together from the best man in the first boat to the worst man in the sixth. He loved to take half-a-dozen eights on an outing together, in order to pit them against each other and rehearse for the coming struggle. On such occasions, he set one reflecting what a brilliant military commander he might have been, had not family tradition forced him to become an Australian sheep-farmer for twenty years.

He did not spoil the outing for his crews by keeping up a continuous chatter from the bank. That was clean contrary to his principles. He contented himself with terse remarks addressed to the crew as a whole, punctuating them with a few words of encouragement now and then to an individual whose rowing showed signs of improvement, and occasional asides to anyone who was cycling with him: “Lean her along! Leeean her along! . . . Jimmy’s a lot better to-day. . . . Leeean her along! . . . (*delightedly*) Just look at Jimmy. . . . Feather high! Leeean her along! My word, Jimmy has improved. Well rowed, Jimmy. Easy, cox! . . . Jimmy, you’re rowing a lot better to-

day. You're rowing better than you've rowed ever since Christmas. Right away, cox. . . . Watch y'r blades! Leeean her along!"

On returning to the boat-house he would take various members of the crew on one side and talk to them in turn about their individual faults, while the others waited at a little distance. When the interviews were over, he would indulge in a little banter with the general company and then return to his rooms at Maid's Causeway [a street in Cambridge near Jesus College. – P.M.], where he spent the rest of the day. He would fill up the interval until dinner by answering any letters which had arrived since lunch time, or by writing a rowing letter to a newspaper, occasionally enclosing a note to the editor with some such postscript as: "Punctuate to taste, and correct to fact." After dinner he would play bridge with undergraduates – a different relay of men each evening – the play being interspersed with a good deal of Steve's chaff and ever-ready humour, or with his serious reflections on life in general and the University in particular. The opinions which he expressed at these gatherings were at times somewhat surprising. More than once, for instance, he expressed his conviction that all dons should be in Holy Orders. After bridge there would be a little more rowing talk, and the company would disperse.

Steve's critics often complained that his rowing gospel, unlike that of orthodox coaches, was unsettled and liable to be changed from time to time. The charge is partly true. The essentials of his teaching, though they expanded and developed, did not change for many years before his death; but, as far as details are concerned, his critics were in the right, and indeed were bound to be so. For could a man of his restless and original mind concentrate all his energies on a single subject for a long period of years without evolving fresh ideas from time to time? Even the greatest revolutionary in rowing history could not so far surpass all revolutionaries in all other spheres as to succeed in producing at the outset a programme which would stand the test of experience in every particular.

There was, moreover, something of far deeper import than originality or revolution working in his mind, something which for ever prevented him from formulating a definitive creed and holding fast to its every article. He saw rowing in a different light from all other men, for he had made it his link with the metaphysical world. The longer he coached, and the more victories he won, the more he was haunted by a vision of something which he knew to be beyond the power of himself or any other man to attain or even to conceive – perfect rowing.

Consequently, if he had lived another twenty years he would have gone on experimenting and developing his theories to the last, for ever striving to get nearer and nearer to the unattainable. Whatever he may have said in controversy, he knew in his heart that none of his crews even approached the ideal, and that they were merely so much material to help him in his quest. If one of them scored a victory, he would receive the news with evident satisfaction, but without enthusiasm, for his mind was set on things far higher than a victory for himself or his club. He would acquiesce in the subsequent bump supper and bonfire without attending either; they were his concessions to men who had never seen the vision that he had seen. While they were

enjoying themselves in their own way, he would be mentally summing up the points in which the successful crew had fallen short of the ideal. His mind would turn at once to planning the next stage in his quest of the unattainable, and he would sit down and write: “One can never really row; one can only illustrate in a boat what one thinks rowing is.”

Those words of his might well be carved on the stone which marks the resting-place of his ashes under the shadow of Jesus Chapel. They are the quintessence of Fairbairnism.

F. Brittain 1938

Frederick Brittain, 1893-1969, a don at Jesus College Cambridge, was a member of Fairbairn’s inner circle. In 1930 he wrote “Oar, Scull and Rudder”, the first comprehensive bibliography of rowing literature, with an introduction by Steve Fairbairn. He also wrote “The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge” with Humphrey Blake Playford, 1896-1981, Jesus College, Boat Race Winner 1920, ‘21, ’22, in 1928. Refer to “The Don’s List”, *http://www.rowinghistory.net/don's_list.htm*, by historian Thomas E. Weil.